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Imagined Intimacy: Friendship, Conquest, and Futurity in the Transatlantic Eighteenth Century

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Imagined Intimacy: Friendship, Conquest, and Futurity in the Transatlantic Eighteenth Century

by

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Dedication

For Avis Percival Davis—I wrote this for you, and I miss you every day

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Abstract

Imagined Intimacy: Friendship, Conquest, and Futurity in the Transatlantic Eighteenth Century

by

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This dissertation considers some ways that friendship was imagined in the fledgling years of our globalized Western culture. The pathos of friendship is not exempt from the pressures of culture and economy, particularly those of transatlantic capitalism in the eighteenth century. It is impossible to pinpoint when capitalism began to undermine the ethos of expressive friendship, but the three texts in this dissertation offer distinctive modes for accessing neoclassical language to describe the uncertainties of life produced by one's valuation as capital. The overarching intention of this study is to consider the dimensional intimacies of friendship born from the forcible removal of one's humanity. While the first two chapters consider the white individual's responsibility for globalized and colonized friendships, the third offers a view of intimate black futurity rebuilt on the ashes of our history.

Chapter One uses Tobias Smollett's novel *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748) to disambiguate friendship as a contractual obligation born of interest. The titular character engages a series of friends in his search for wealth and love throughout this picaresque novel; his experiences highlight "friendship" as an ambiguous term easily (re)defined. Chapter Two examines the friendship of white womanhood in Susanna Rowson's *Reuben and Rachel: A Tale of Old Times* (1798) to question the benevolent assumptions undergirding the sensibility studies of the Early American republic. The third and final chapter considers black friendship and futurity, as distilled by the transatlantic diaspora, by mapping the spiritual neighborhood one joins when reading Phillis Wheatley's poetry while black. I explore Wheatley's friendship with Obour Tanner; her potential friendship with Scipio Moorhead; the imagined community her words engendered in Ignatius Sancho and Jupiter Hammon; and the twenty-first century black femmes who find futurity in Phillis Wheatley. My short Coda will explore some of the ways that queer black friendship embodies a particular vulnerability, which our failing capitalist society refuses to confront as it builds narratives of security on white supremacist notions of sustainability.

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Introduction

Why Does Friendship Matter:
Uncovering the Power of Sustained Vulnerability

My parents had distinctive stories, but by the time I was born they were both Caribbean immigrants to America—both with bachelor's degrees, one not yet with citizenship. Both were devout Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) who came to the faith separately. My mother was a middle-class girl from the US Virgin Islands, and my father was determined to raise his children to the standards that could never be achieved in his own loving but impoverished family. In my widower father's mind, all of his achievements and those of his children are the work of a God he has depended on since Adventist missionaries from Pennsylvania helped build his local primary school. In much the way that mission priests crossed the Atlantic in the name of the Holy Roman Emperor, so American evangelicals took their doctrines to those islands full of newly freed slaves. The missionary tradition is ugly, but to my father, the Adventist faith and its people are nothing but light. Adventism is the reason my parents ever met and indirectly, my *raison d'etre*. My high school years were spent at a boarding academy in Hamburg, Pennsylvania, a town of 4,200 people and comprised primarily of farmland. For college I went to Andrews University, the flagship Adventist university that US News and World Report consistently ranks in the top three nationwide for ethnic diversity. It is also located in the smallest of towns—Berrien Springs, population 1,700, whose claims to fame include one of Muhammad Ali's houses and, by the time I was there, having more

than one stoplight. Millennial Seventh-day Adventists joke about the cultural bubble that the small-town lifestyle creates: your school friends are also your church friends and also your life friends. Saturday meetings were often an all-day affair, beginning with Sabbath School and usually ending at one of those friend's house, napping after an excellent afternoon of laughter and food. If you took part in Pathfinders, a co-ed version of the Girl- and Boy Scouts, you saw those church friends bright and early on Sunday too. In the summer you could go to sleep-away camp and learn horseback riding, with copious trips to the pool. These experiences of friendship shaped my research in immeasurable ways, and I could not reckon with friendship until I fully understood the transatlantic and mystical layers of my own existence.

The story of my family's religion goes that in 1831, Baptist preacher and rural New York farmer William Miller announced his confirmed calculations: According to Daniel 8:14, Jesus was going to return soon and the people needed to prepare themselves for heaven. By 1844, his estimated Advent, he had gathered a following of "Millerites" who waited on October 22 with bated breath for their first sight of the coming savior. What they got instead, as midnight came and October 23 began, was The Great Disappointment. The Millerites experienced an earth-shattering schism, with many abandoning the faith or forming smaller local communities in doctrinal reaction to William Miller's failings. Adventism grew from the branch that decided the failure was not of faith or trust, but of imagination. Adventists believe above all that the long-awaited second coming is always-already at hand, but Miller could not predict it because

humanity has no true knowledge of God's vast capacity to make meaning. The goal, then, was to wait in expectation. The legend of Seventh-day Adventist beginnings is clear: in moments of disappointment, you don't break—you bend. When you expand the boundaries of your understanding, your community expands as well.

This now worldwide community of hopeful bedfellows is where I began to imagine intimacy. To an outsider an Adventist campmeeting is likely indistinguishable from many others that have occurred since the first Great Awakening, complete with charismatic preachers and emotional calls to the altar. Moreover, Adventism's ability to camouflage itself within the immediate culture made it devastatingly common in its racial politics. Almost from birth I was camping with a Pathfinder troop, and I begrudgingly attended two separate campmeetings every summer with my deeply involved parents. In these two distinctively similar sites of religious community, Adventism's history of segregation was almost immediately apparent. We lived in Pennsylvania, home to two separate Adventist boarding schools run by two different regional authorities: the Allegheny East conference (AE) and the Pennsylvania conference (PA). As a small child, I didn't really understand why the PA campmeetings were heavily white, while AE campmeetings were a sea of black faces. My sister and I played a game, tallying how many white people we saw at AE gatherings because they were so rare. We didn't count more than ten per campmeeting until I was in my twenties. Segregation is common to nearly all sectarian American traditions, but early SDA leadership chose to re-prioritize around more benevolent mission and community support, so there has never been an

explicit need to excise racism from its doctrine. Though it is invisible to most, Adventism is present in nearly every country on Earth through its international healthcare and research communities, as well as in schools and universities on every continent but Antarctica. Of the twenty-five million Adventists worldwide, only one million are based in the US. To paraphrase a boast from the Victorian era, the sun never sets on the Adventist community.

Just as the Millerites chose to change, the diversity of the worldwide church cannot be summed up in a tidy fashion because each locality expands and contracts to fit the needs of its members. In many cases the rules of engagement vary not just between continents, but also inside each of its smallest communities. An SDA family can easily live a life totally immersed in their local church community, although this is by no means a requirement. SDA has no doctrinal head, and every five years representatives from every continent converge to vote on any changes or additions to the twenty-eight fundamental beliefs. These assemblies are also an excuse to gather the world community and revel in its diversity. The outcome of this presbyterian decentralization is that every church family is different. I've attended services fired by the ecstatic spirit of Pentecostal expression, while others had the respectful solemnity of an Episcopalian mass. When those opposing groups met at campmeeting sites, awkwardness was certain at the start; but like a good family reunion, a potluck and a few silly stories would clear that right out. Even though I lived inside of this eclectic family, it took me some time to realize that I have understood what is meant by "imagined community" for far longer than I've been

familiar with Benedict Anderson's claim that community "is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). Nationalism is like having a church family—you like some of the group more than you like others, but the shared goal of yearning for perfect community keeps the friendships alive even as the individuals wrestle with the reality of untenable conflict. That is the pleasure and pain of church family: they are chosen, but that choice is also a commitment. At church I learned to see the varied textures and shapes of belonging, and the ways that family and friendship bleed together at these sites of spiritual intimacy. I would spend the next six years far from these sites, missing them, gaining an acute awareness of that more diffuse yearning for belonging in those people around me.

Anderson studies the imagined nation "as if it belonged with 'kinship' and 'religion,' rather than with 'liberalism' or 'fascism'" (5); in 2019 it would be difficult to argue against the near-religious kinship found in Trump-era white nationalism. If nationalism goes with kinship and religion without requiring blood relation or imaginary exactitude, friendship seems the most comfortable synecdoche for these non-familial but loving relationships. Thinking about the human need for family feels particularly prescient now, with academics in the sciences and humanities anxiously describe the repercussions of our society-wide decay, but it is in truth the urge inherent to most life on Earth—to continue the species by any means necessary. Technological advancement has made preemptive, large-scale self-protection into a leading cause of death planetwide.

Within the rigid confines of westernized heteropatriarchy, every dimension of social sympathy prioritizes relational capital over soulful vulnerability. Parents hope that their children will love them and appreciate their sacrifices. Children, saddled with their parents' debts and dreams, carve out lives that they hope will satisfy the sacrifices of their forbears. We take this need for belonging into the world, searching for a match even while we remain uncertain of its texture and shape. Romantic partners, we hope, will provide the lifelong emotional assurance of our elusive existential purpose. Simultaneously we hope that our family will take care of us when no one else will, and we assume our own participation in this exchange. And we crave this assurance because we know that the nation we depend on weaponizes our weary appreciation without reciprocation. This is the modern normative family, whose layers of love are weighed with the psychic burden of expectation. Friendship has not escaped this weight, but the word's connotation of voluntary affection provides a semblance of self-knowledge in our existential entropy.

Western thinkers have attempted to describe this moment of self-knowledge since the beginning of recorded history. Where would Gilgamesh have been without the loyal Enkidu, whose death inspired the awakening of his conscious spirit? Plato's *Lysis* strives without success to define friendship, ending with Socrates exclaiming: "O Menexenus and Lysis, how ridiculous that you two boys, and I, an old boy, who would fain be one of you, should imagine ourselves to be friends—this is what the by-standers will go away and say—and as yet we have not been able to discover what is a friend!" It is a seemingly

easy question, yet no two people would provide the same answer when asked "what are friends for?" Aristotle's Nichomachean ethics posits that true friendship lies in the shared search for *eudaimonia*—a soul-deep contentment with one's self and humanity. Like Gilgamesh's feelings for Enkidu, Cicero's *amicitia* emerges from Laelius' grief at the death of his friend Scipio Africanus. Cicero makes no definitive statement on the forms a perfect friendship must take, noting instead that a friendship must be between two good people. Rather than falling into the tendency of "philosophers who push their definitions to a superfluous accuracy," Cicero's only definition of good men is that "to the best of human ability they follow nature as the most perfect guide to a good life" (*Laelius de Amicitia*). Classical friendship is too individualized and multifaceted to pin down, but as the exigency of globalization and resource theft has accelerated in the modern age, defining friendship became a strategic necessity.

By the time neoclassical authors turned again to this question, the pathos of friendship was firmly entrenched in the unrepentant throes of transatlantic capitalism. In many eighteenth-century British novels, such as *The Adventures of Roderick Random,* the "hand of friendship" is offered by someone with the means and interest to elevate a character whose poverty is described as "friendlessness." The clear message is that friends are the difference between life or death—not just emotionally, but literally. It is impossible to pinpoint when capitalism began to undermine the ethos of expressive friendship, but the three texts in this dissertation offer distinctive modes for accessing neoclassical language to describe the uncertainties of life produced by one's valuation as

capital. Friendship here is radical because its definition refuses cultural standardization: though it can be used in the service of dominant norms to great devastation, it also can generate existential solace for the dehumanized and unquantifiable soul.

This dissertation grows around authors from the eighteenth century, but it is less about chronology than chronotope.[1] It is about the ways that they, in the fledgling years of our globalized Western culture, imagined friendship in their texts. It is also about the assumptions that often undergird our choices when extending the hand of friendship, and what it means to live in uneasy community with those who are friends in name only. It is about the European colonial need to own rather than to coexist, and the use of novel and narrative as tools for revolutionary propaganda. But the overarching intention of this study is to consider the dimensional intimacies of friendship born from the forcible removal of one's humanity. While the first two chapters consider the white individual's responsibility for globalized and colonized friendships, the third offers a view of intimate black futurity rebuilt on the ashes of our history. In her narrative introduction to *The Common Pot*, a monograph about indigenous persistence despite ahistorical erasure, Lisa Brooks speaks with her friend Natalie about the process of writing and simultaneously discovering the vast archive of "things that were taken from us…knowledge that was hidden" (xx). This knowledge is not unexpected, but its cultural invisibility made it understood rather than expressed: as Natalie says, "Deep inside me, I always knew" (xx). Genocide is not just the death of the body, but also the mass violence of replacing

[1] Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel."

ancestral knowledge with existential uncertainty for the generations that follow. Like Brooks, I have used my ancestral knowledge of pain and kinship to understand the many layered fluidities in the transatlantic diaspora and its initiation by agents motivated by their own violent relationship to ancestry. All three of my authors experienced and chronicled these upheavals. The following chapters examine how the small intimacies they imagine as literary friendship help people survive the turmoil of colonial expansion throughout the century.

Chapter One uses Tobias Smollett's novel *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748) to tease apart and disambiguate friendship as a contractual obligation born of interest, even as friendship in the text evokes the language borrowed from ancient Greek philosophers speaking on friendships of the soul. The titular character engages a series of friends in his search for wealth and love throughout this picaresque novel; his experiences highlight "friendship" as an ambiguous term easily (re)defined. This chapter considers Smollett's use of friendship and self-interest throughout the novel's first volume on three distinct levels, highlighting the ways that friendship discursively blankets the uncomfortable juxtaposition of emotion and profit that powered eighteenth-century global capitalism. Whether in friendship with a fellow countryman or in search of interested patrons responsive to familial reputation, Roderick experiences the varying levels of instability one might encounter when one is of no particular importance to anyone else. The volume's climactic event is the 1741 Battle of Cartagena de Indias: notable for its high death toll despite its relative insignificance to the War of Jenkins' Ear,

it is a scene where Smollett highlights the damage individuals can sustain as pawns of the international game of economic interest.

Chapter Two is about the friendship of white womanhood and its attendant caveats. There exists an extensive history chronicling the modes of communication employed by eighteenth-century women, particularly regarding their friendships of shared sensibility throughout the Atlantic world.[2] This chapter acknowledges these scholars' necessary work in understanding the creative modes of communication women employed, but uses Susanna Rowson's *Reuben and Rachel: A Tale of Old Times* (1798) to question the benevolent assumptions undergirding the sensibility studies of the Early American republic. In Rowson's novel we read a generational tale of Christopher Columbus and his many descendants as they strive to inherit the Americas, but the story is primarily told in the voices of the family matriarchs. Where this dissertation's first chapter focused on the power white men found as they pillaged the Atlantic basin for profit, this chapter addresses the more insidious power harnessed by white women to protect the ever-important white family. White women are the birthplace of the white family and remain dedicated to its safety, even as they express simultaneous frustration with their lives in the private sphere—for instance, how Rowson's female characters teach each other the ability to bottle frustrations for the sake of the republic. Tracing friendship in this text builds on the Smollett chapter, as its approach to colonialism fully

[2] Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies* and *Sister Arts*; Wigginton, *In the Neighborhood;* Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*; Harris, *American Women Writers to 1800;* Todd, *Women's Friendship in Literature*.

embraces the language of relational sensibility while erasing indigenous rhetorics and lives through kinship and hybridity. In this text, female friendships become didactic spaces that reify kinship and the sacrifices necessary to empire-building. Between Smollett's and Rowson's narratives, the forward momentum of white male colonial violence is balanced by the needs of the white family, giving the characters' actions the guise of self-defense.

The third and final chapter considers black friendship and futurity, as distilled by the transatlantic diaspora, by mapping the circle of friendship one joins when reading Phillis Wheatley's poetry while black. Whereas the first two chapters chronicle the danger attendant with white offers of friendship, this one considers the generative futurity found in sites where black folks create community. Wheatley's geographic community and its effect on her publication has been beautifully explicated, most recently by Caroline Wigginton, who writes: "Our understanding of communal transformation and the persistence of particularity must attend to the neighborhood, that peculiar, motley, uncomfortable territory where we all reside" (26). In a similar vein, I explore the potential friendship between Phillis Wheatley and Scipio Moorhead, a young enslaved man whom she may have known through the slaveholders they lived with. Wheatley and Moorhead's friendship is embodied through a portrait and a poem, in contrast to her spatially-distant friendship with Obour Tanner which exists now as Wheatley's one-sided replies to Tanner's encouraging words. I also spend time with the words of Ignatius Sancho and Jupiter Hammon, men who felt community with Wheatley despite never

meeting her in person. This chapter is about Wheatley's spiritual neighborhood: her one space of self-determination; her access to the emotional wellspring of black men and women who imbibe her genius while mourning the black intellectuals we continue to lose. I use the term "black imaginary" to define a mode of thinking that is instinctual to blackness despite its invisibility to dominant Western culture, and I end the chapter with a meditation on twenty-first century black femmes who find futurity in Phillis Wheatley.

The language and structure of this study is owed directly to the academics who came before me, but my own affective connections generated its deepest questions. If there is prose here that feels anathema to the dissertation genre, you may consider it momentary ruptures from an institutional framework that asks us to perform emotional distance as academic objectivity. My own approach to queer poetics and friendship was influenced largely by black women and femmes adjacent to traditional academic work: Ijeoma Oluo, Rachel Cargle, Roxane Gay, and Crissle West have been particularly intriguing interlocutors, but they are only a few among many. I must also point to the vast array of queer communities online where I have met and theorized with others whose identities fall outside of the traditional boundaries of discursive queer studies—whose aromantic, asexual, and non-binary expressions disrupt the careful construction of the acceptable modes of visible homonormativity now entrenched in Pride celebrations. Conceptualizing friendship as a space for limitless affect emerges from my online communities. In these spaces, the definition of friendship resides in an individual's very

existence rather than in the benefit of interest that powers so many affective connections, as I show in this work.

In defining friendship, I've presented these texts out of chronological order so that Phillis Wheatley's community—and the hope found within it—can send the reader off with a sense of what I believe to be true: when we consider relationships that are transnational, distinct from traditional family structures, and non-linear, we learn to differentiate between intimacy and coercion. Friendship is an amorphous term for a wide range of relationships that confound our predetermined economic structures based around normative familial or romantic human connection. Its definition depends entirely on the two beings inside of it, and no outside speculation will ever encompass its relational complexity. It can be your butch auntie who always brings her "long-time roommate" to the family gatherings, or the eight-year-old girls using iPads and child-friendly video games to explore a single digital castle from separate locations. True friendship, regardless of its visible forms, is a radical queer politics differentiated, as Cathy N. Cohen describes, by its "ability to create a space in opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformational political work can begin" (438). My short Coda will explore some of the ways that queer black friendship embodies a particular vulnerability, which our failing capitalist society refuses to confront as it builds narratives of security on white supremacist notions of sustainability.

Chapter 1

"I was born in the northern part of this united kingdom:" Nationalism, Interest, and Colonial Violence in *Roderick Random*

Tobias Smollett produced *The Adventures of Roderick Random* in a time of discord for Britain and its holdings. Published in 1748, the novel's action takes place in the three decades prior. It follows the title character as he experiences the trials of being an unrecognized gentleman of Scottish birth whose fortunes resemble that of a nobleman's third son—someone who would be expected to earn a naval commission or excel in a respectable profession. A search for literature on Smollett published in the last 50 years yields few monographs, none of which focus primarily on *The Adventures of Roderick Random*. Articles on the novel in the last twenty years have considered its depiction of naval impressment and, to a lesser extent, the pressures of eighteenth century expansionism as the middle class and popular culture emerge.[3] Though less popular with scholars in the most recent decades of transatlantic literary scholarship, *Roderick Random* has never gone out of print since its first release. It captures the experiences of those who were sacrificed to Britain's imperial will from the perspective of a man whose own country had recently been formally united with England, and it does so with exciting adventures and horrific abuses by those who pretended at friendship. It's easy to imagine

[3] For more on impressment in this novel and in the period, see Ennis, "Naval Impressment in Tobias Smollett's *Roderick Random*"; Brunsman, "Men of War"; and Jarvis, "The Binds of the Anxious Mariner." For more on this novel and popular culture, see Thorn, "*Roderick Random*, literacy, and the appropriation of plebeian culture"; Shields, "Smollett's Scots and Sodomites"; and Haggerty, "Smollett's World of Masculine Desire."

why it was so popular across America immediately upon its release: like Roderick, the colonies were beginning to feel the negative effects of their supposed friendship with England as their taxes funded the posturing wars of the Kings George (Basker xxxvi). Roderick's lifelong journey through achievement and betrayal highlights the many ways that friendship in the search for capital can have highly destructive consequences.

Tobias Smollett lived a transatlantic life of his own. Born in Scotland to one of the landed gentry, Smollett served as a naval surgeon and spent a few years in Jamaica before his return to England, where he enjoyed a successful career writing picaresque novels. Although Smollett vehemently denied any autobiographical component to *Roderick Random*, the protagonist's life has clear similarities to Smollett's, even including a wealthy wife from the colonies. Like Smollett himself, the character also serves as a ship's surgeon during the War of Jenkins' Ear.[4] The climactic scene of the novel's first half is the 1741 Battle of Cartagena, a naval engagement in Colombia's greatest harbor that Smollett himself witnessed, and which Britain still prefers to forget. Smollett's third-person "Account of the Expedition against Cartagena" heavily influences the first-person experiences relayed by Roderick, and the trauma of those fictional scenes conveys the grave misuse of resources and people during that siege when Roderick's own shipmates are sacrificed to its hopeless cause. All of Roderick's friendships throughout the text take place in a series of imagined communities that he enters by virtue of blood

[4] The War of Jenkins' Ear between England and Spain lasted from 1739-1748. It was primarily induced by simmering tensions around the English profiting from the slave trade in Spanish colonial territory. Its name was coined after the Spanish coast guard boarded a English merchant ship, despite treaties between the nations, and cut off the ear of its civilian captain Robert Jenkins in 1731.

or patriotic relationality, a particular avenue for success where white men are nearly guaranteed to profit.

Smollett's writing is a perfect example of the early eighteenth-century neoclassical tradition. He regularly alludes to the work of Greek and Roman philosophers, as a well-educated novelist of the time would. Those influences show particularly through Roderick's series of male friendships and the benefits that come with such friendship. In this not-quite-a-bildungsroman, Roderick must form relationships with those who can assist him in finally claiming his believed birthright, but he quickly learns that not all help is offered in good faith. These relationships have many different inflections, but Roderick at one point or another claims all of them as "friend." In fact, the word appears with various suffixes 293 times throughout the text and, despite his misadventures, only once does he describe himself as friendless. While Smollett's chosen word for these multivalent relationships is "friendship," all of its uses throughout relate in some way to "interest," a term that contained an "overlapping of formal and emotional meaning" in the eighteenth century, as sensibility began to overwrite more obsequious models of patronage (Bertelsen 78).

Raymond Williams follows this shift in *Keywords*, noting that "it is exceptionally difficult to trace the development of interest, first to a common name for a general or natural concern, and beyond this to something which first 'naturally' and then just 'actually' attracts our attention" (172). Prior to the late seventeenth century, the use of interest was primarily in financial relationships between a patron or liege-lord and their

responsibilities to their wards and servants. As global capitalism took shape and the middle class emerged, the term's connotation shifted: through the eighteenth century, attention and interest in another person took on meanings of emotional sensibility and soulful relation. Smollett wrote *Roderick Random* in the 1740s, a perfect time to consider this transition of interested action from ownership to friendship. Interest was profit, and in a burgeoning capitalist economy it could be separated from the literal item or person that provided its worth. The emerging middle class allowed authors literary independence from patrons not, as Roy Porter notes, "due to the absolute drying up of private largesse. Rather, the growth of an audience enabled the resourceful and talented to fare well without it" (245). Porter particularly mentions Smollett's financial success as a translator and editor when highlighting new avenues available to "those who live off of skills and knowledge" (245). Roderick's journey depends on his acquisition of skills, but he only has access to said skills because of the interest generated by his particular proximity to power. The lot of a white man with a decent education can lead to opportunities for supposed greatness, and the financial underpinnings of friendship provide limitless avenues to subjugate millions into slavery.

In this chapter, I am considering Smollett's portrayal of interest in Volume One of *Roderick Random* on three distinct interpersonal levels: the unequal but individual friendship between Roderick and Strap that highlights the unequal expectations of their very distinct paths in life; Roderick's ability to navigate opportunities within his uncle's extended network aboard the *Thunder*; and the transatlantic relationship between

European nations that turns Roderick's friends into expendable ammunition. Roderick's experiences highlight how easily a friendless individual can be sacrificed to the will of a nation. Further, the political fallout of the Battle of Cartagena shows the impossibility of realizing an ideal neoclassical friendship in a world that requires dedication to the nation and its accumulation of global capital above all else. Between the emerging middle class and England's relatively stable constitutional monarchy, it was ever more pressing that the nation-state should update its methods for maintaining a loyal populace, and the sentimental was an avenue that built loyalty upon relation rather than duty. This dialogue between two definitions of interest, presented in Smollett's account of the Battle of Cartagena, national and kinship ties are the window dressing that dignify war and conquest, making the interested resource grab a mere side effect of their success.

The best neoclassical cognates for friendship here are *philia* and *amicitia*, descended respectively from the Aristotelian and Ciceronian traditions. In *Perfecting Friendship: Politics and Affiliation in Early American Literature*, Ivy Schweitzer opens with an extensive analysis of Aristotelian friendship, in which "the friend who will most accurately reflect oneself is someone equal or similar in virtue" (36). In contrast, Ciceronian amicitia attempts to convey an embodied view of friendship that revolves primarily around a notion of the second self. Written as the oration of Gaius Laelius Sapiens upon the death of his closest friend Scipio Africanus, Cicero's mourning Laelius emphasizes the necessity for spiritual compatibility in true friendship: "For everyone loves himself, not with a view of acquiring some profit himself from his self-love, but

because he is dear to himself on his own account; and unless this same feeling were transferred to friendship, the real friend would never be found; for he is, as it were, another self" (79-80). These friendships of the soul are translated neoclassically into friendships of gentlemanly equality, access to which is barred by Roderick's unlucky upbringing.

Roderick—called Rory by his friends—begins his tale with the quotation that heads this chapter, preemptively reminding us that his social position as a man born of the oldest bloodlines in Briton has been ordained from birth. He is born to the youngest son of a landed gentleman and one of the household's young maids. The young woman is a poor relative given work on account of the gentleman's charity, which he then quickly retracts when he learns of his son's marriage to her. As the tale begins, a Highland dream interpreter tells the young parents that their son would travel widely, "undergo many dangers and difficulties, and at last return to his native land, where he would flourish in happiness and reputation," setting the scene for an array of misadventures (17). After his mother's preventable childbed death and his father's subsequent grief-stricken disappearance, Roderick is left in care of the rich grandfather who cares as little for him as he did for Roderick's parents. His childhood is spent in ignominy and poverty at the village school, but it enables him to make his first friends, Hugh Strap and Jeremy Gawky, both of whom continue to feature throughout Volume One. While Gawky is the son and heir of landed gentry, Strap is the son and heir of the village shoemaker. They are happy with their situations in a way that Roderick cannot be: Gawky's life mirrors

Roderick's ideal life, while Strap's mirrors the degradation Roderick may be relegated to based on the circumstances that his grandfather has no problem leaving him in.

His luck changes when his maternal uncle, Lieutenant Tom Bowling, returns from overseas and learns of his nephew's reduced circumstances. When the old gentleman dies and leaves Roderick with no familial recognition in the will, his uncle places him in the home of an apothecary to attend university. Although Roderick's childhood was poor, he claims his education in classical languages and belle-lettres has been extensive enough that, "added to a good face and shape, [he] acquired the esteem and acquaintance of the most considerable people in town" (32). This is the first time that Roderick learns how deeply capital is tied to influence: when Bowling goes into self-imposed exile for accidentally shooting his Captain, without his income Rory can no longer pay tuition and board. Bowling fully expects the landlord to behave in friendship and assist his nephew, but the landlord has a very different perspective. He quickly forces Roderick onto the streets in search of more interested friends.

When he implores the now-Squire Gawky for monetary help, he receives a handful of half-pence and leaves "extremely mortified at [Gawky's] indifference; for he neither expressed any sympathy for my mishap, nor desire of alleviating my distress" (35). Roderick's expectation of this friend is based in his belief that their similar upbringings and genteel parentage should inspire a form of sympathetic patronage; he does not realize that his need for patronage had already disqualified him from the intimacy he believed he was due. Interest of the heart, it seems, cannot coexist with

financial interest in a young gentleman's life. Thankfully Roderick's abilities and perceived gentility provide him with yet another friend in the local surgeon, who provides him with travel money and a plan to join the Navy if he can make it to London.

Halfway through his journey, Roderick stops in Newcastle for a shave and unexpectedly reunites with Hugh Strap. This is a stroke of luck that Roderick desperately needs, but his appreciation for Strap is as a subordinate rather than an equal, even as Strap is actively engaged in fulfilling his dreams. Leaving the family business of shoemaking to become a barber is an act of courage that Roderick treats with the condescending humor of his birth, despite his own less-fortunate circumstances. Roderick's birth status makes him the de facto leader of their journey to London, but his ignorance of the wider world and misplaced pride repeatedly leads them into danger and degradation. Almost immediately after their arrival in London, they meet a fellow Scotsman who performs honesty by returning money that Roderick supposedly dropped in the street and taking the two for a drink. To Roderick this is evidence that the man is "a prodigy of integrity"; the friendship is sealed when the stranger claims "I never meet a scotchman but my heart warms," then launches into a long soliloquy on the greatness of Scotland and its heritage compared to the relative youth of England (73). For Roderick, this is enough to spark a beautiful friendship.

While Strap had earlier recognized Roderick by first establishing him as a fellow countryman, Roderick shows a distinct lack of this skill in the encounter and the card game that follows their procurement of new friendship. The stranger gains Roderick's

trust by sharing his nationality and sharing secrets of life in the unfeeling streets of London: “He described a thousand cheats that are daily practised upon the ignorant and unwary; and warned us of them with so much good-nature and concern, that we blessed the opportunity which threw us in his way” (74). Despite his treatment by Squire Gawky, Roderick has not yet understood the levels of coercion he is vulnerable to when he enters unequal friendships. His interpretation of this new friend’s soliloquy assumes a generosity that he continues to expect from his peers, so that very soon the three men have absconded to a local pub where a fourth man, unnamed but ill-tempered, challenges Roderick’s manhood and convinces him into a card game.

The discerning reader can spot the start of a classic scam immediately: the friendly stranger and his bad-cop partner first allow Roderick a test game, giving him back all of his money. They then reel him in by his pride, as easily as they might any other self-indulgent gentleman. Then, once he is convinced of his own abilities with little evidence thereto, there is nothing to do but watch him give his money away. Roderick is so “inflamed with [his] good fortune and the expectation of improving it” that he continues to play, and to lose (75). However, the death blow to his wallet comes from his own suggestion, when the fourth member of the card game insinuates that Roderick and Strap have won through luck rather than skill. For Roderick, a gentleman with none of the rank’s accoutrements, this offense is against his one true possession of honorable patronage. He is susceptible to the slippery texture of friendship in this moment, and in imagining himself a gentleman he proceeds to lose his money apace. Strap, with no

gentlemanly pride to defend, is far more careful with his wallet, which becomes their eventual salvation when their card-playing opponents leave with every dollar Roderick won, and then some. Roderick's birth directs his desires at every turn of their relationship, so that every favor Strap performs Roderick view as merely his due, rather than an emotional obligation to be reciprocated in good faith.

The ensuing scene between Strap and Roderick reveals the multivalent levels of friendship between the supposedly unequal. Strap's is the speaking voice:

> To be sure, Mr. Random, you are born a gentleman, and have a great deal of learning—and, indeed, look like a gentleman …Now myself, I am a poor journeyman barber, tolerably well made and understand some Latin, and have a smattering of Greek; but what of that? Perhaps I might also say, that I know a little of the world; but that is to no purpose,—though you be gentle, and I simple, it does not follow, but that I who am simple may do a good office to you who are gentle…
>
> [*At this point, frustrated by the monologue, Roderick loses his temper and makes crude comments about Strap's parenting in his desire to hear the part that's about him.*]
>
> … but I will no longer detain you in suspense, because (doubtless) nothing is more uneasy than doubt—Dubio procul dubio nil dubius. My friend or relation, or which you will, or both, the schoolmaster, being informed of the regard I have for you; for you may be sure I did not fail to let him know of your good qualities—by

> the bye, he has undertaken to teach you the pronunciation of the English tongue, without which, he says, you will be unfit for business in this country—I say my relation has spoke in your behalf to a French apothecary who wants a journeyman; and on his recommendation you may have fifteen pounds a year, bed and board, whenever you please. (94)

The delivery of this speech is disarming in its honesty, as Strap points out multiple truths: he and Roderick have had similar educations and, until this point, similar travels. Their only true differences are the diverging paths and likelihood of generating interest because of birth, but that does not stop the simple man from helping the gentle. Indeed, perhaps it is this inverted structure of influence that fires Roderick's frustrations with a friendship that has provided his every need. Strap's kindness and influence on Roderick's fortunes cease only because Strap is hired as a gentleman's valet to travel the continent. Strap considers staying with Roderick out of love for his friend, but Roderick's primary emotion is relief that he can shed such a low attachment: "In spite of all the obligations I owed to this poor, honest fellow, *ingratitude is so natural to the heart of man*, that I began to be tired of his acquaintance: and now that I had contracted other friendships which appeared more creditable, was even ashamed to see a journeyman barber inquiring after me with the familiarity of a companion" (103, emphasis mine). In truth, Roderick is uncomfortable with a reminder that his gentle birth cannot get him the life he wants, and once Strap has illuminated the path he should take, Roderick's interest in the friendship is overridden by the appearances he wants to maintain.

"Is this an inherent flaw in humanity?" meme

A student, shabby and tousled after staying indoors studying too long, emerges into the sunlight. In the original image, he sees a butterfly and asks, "Is this a pigeon?" His candid ignorance has become a template for social media discourse about facts, informational context, and/or relationships. The type of individual targeted in each meme generated from this template should, by virtue of their social position, know or accept something that is obvious, but which, due to their willful ignorance or blind privilege, they label as something else. In this version, the author is responding to a note on the blog platform Tumblr. The captions highlight the willful ignorance of white masculinity in ascribing their own flawed behavior to something inherent to human nature.

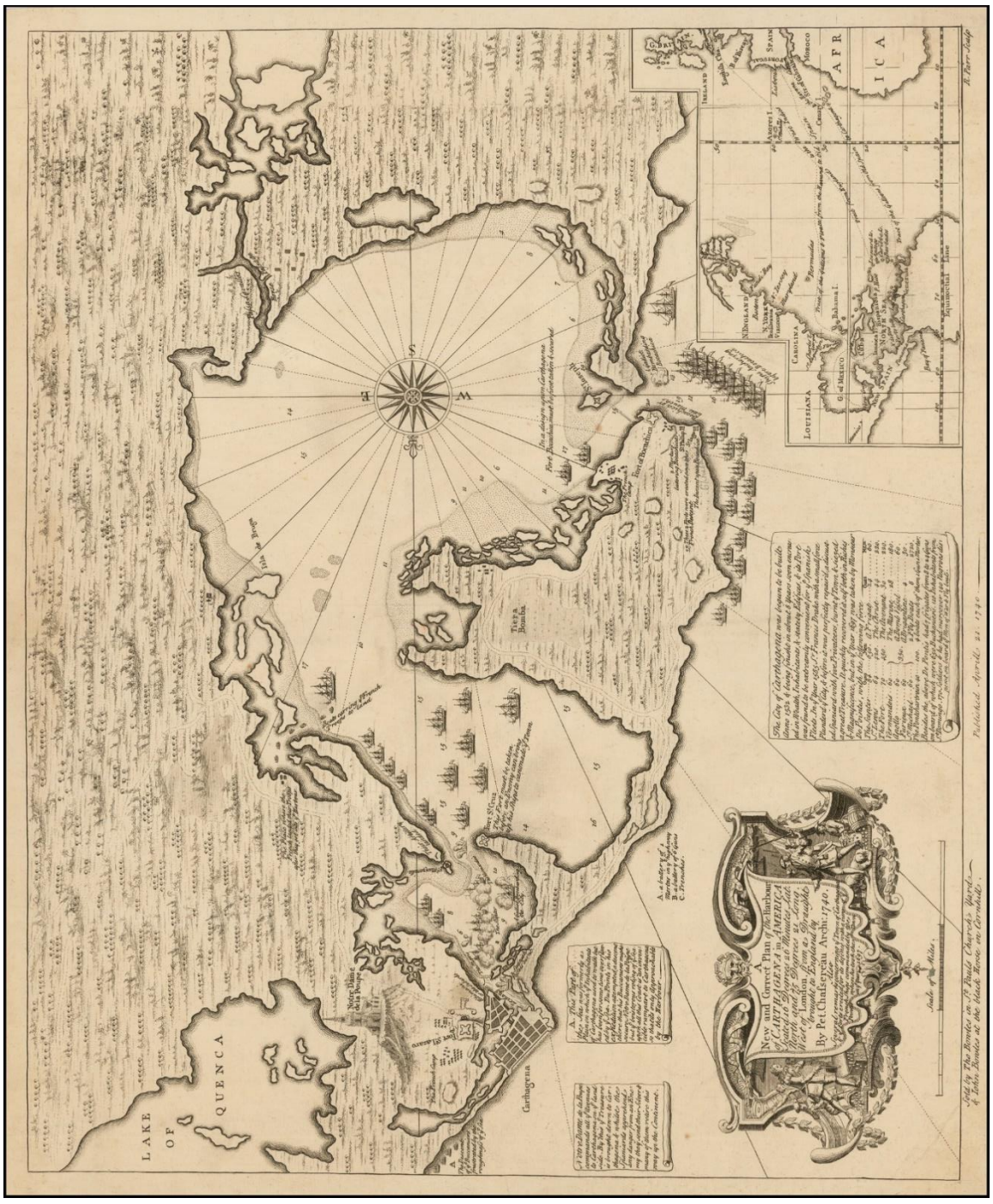
Though Roderick is desperate to be rid of Strap, his fortunes fade very quickly after Strap's departure. Without Strap's intercessory presence, Roderick's place with the apothecary is dependent on his willingness to submit to subordination and the indignities that come with it. But, as he has repeatedly shown, his self-image as a gentleman makes this humility impossible, and it isn't long before he rejects the apothecary's family and lifestyle with an intention to join the Royal Navy. His pride, though sufficient to provide the appearance of gentility, is incapable of funding it. It also fails to serve him upon his visit to the naval office, leaving him with no prospects and a deep uncertainty about his future. Without Strap to temper his tendency to find trouble, Roderick is picked up by a pressgang and sent to the *Thunder*, his uncle's previous posting, and is soon headed to South America. All this is almost, but not quite, what he wanted. Roderick's original goal in traveling to London was to use his lieutenant uncle's reputation to generate interest at the naval office; being handcuffed in the ship's bowels is a significant detour and Roderick expresses his outrage vociferously. However, despite his ill-usage when he is brought aboard ship, using his uncle Lieutenant Bowling's reputation is integral to his ability to survive aboard the *Thunder*. His first stroke of luck is in the form of Jack Rattlin, an uneducated but heartfelt sailor whose esteem for Tom Bowling is the basis for Roderick's easy climb through the ranks.

Roderick knows the danger he could be in on his uncle's old ship: the Captain's injury at Tom's hand tempers Roderick's initial relationship with Jack, to the point that that he waits to mention his relationship to Bowling. It is only after Rattlin's recitation of

the bravery and honesty of Lieutenant Bowling that Roderick claims his relative: "In consequence of which connexion, [Jack] expressed an inclination to serve me" (128). Having the good-natured Jack Rattlin in Roderick's service gets his wounds dressed by Dr. Thomson, a ship's mate who was the only individual at the Navy Office who had a favorable view of Roderick on the day of his impressment. Thomson, we soon realize, is the friend most perfectly situated to marry the financial and kinship-style interest that Roderick desires most of all. A sympathetic man with a quality naval commission, Thomson is an example of the successful naval career to which Roderick aspires: he can illuminate the paths to interested parties, especially since he is also one of Roderick's best sources of interpersonal information. Captain Oakhum is the man whose injury sent Bowling into exile, and Roderick's advantageous introduction to the ship's culture is early enough to keep him safely out of the captain's notice. Thomson treats the wounds Roderick suffered at the hands of his captors and, learning of his short-lived apothecary education, very quickly offers to expand his medical training. While helping Thomson treat the rest of the wounded, Roderick gains the positive attention of the ship's surgeon. His upward trajectory out of bondage and into the Navy becomes immediately clear. Very soon after Roderick begins his new training, a shake-up to the ship's command structure brings him to the Captain's attention. The kind surgeon is moving to a commission on a second-rate vessel; his parting gift is to recommend Roderick as surgeon's third mate aboard the *Thunder*. The surgeon performs this generosity while he receives his own orders, in a moment of unexpected thoughtfulness. The ship's doctor

makes clear his admiration for Roderick's skill, but he also proclaims his fondness for Bowling to be a strong endorsement.

The opposite is true of Captain Oakhum, whose grudge against Lieutenant Bowling has not abated. Thomson's interest in furthering Roderick's career is the perfect foil for Captain Oakhum's counter-interest upon learning Roderick's identity. The Captain's counter-interest—worse than if he were merely disinterested—is intensified by the arrival of Dr. Mackshane, the ship's new head surgeon. Mackshane and Roderick butt heads over the appropriate treatment for his friend Jack Rattlin's leg injury: Mackshane is quick to order an amputation despite Morgan and Thomson's insistence that the leg can be saved. While Roderick's supposition allows Rattlin to keep his appendage, the unlucky effect is Mackshane's disfavor. A week later, this disfavor leads to serious consequences: Roderick is "loaded with irons, and stapled to the deck, on pretence that I was a spy on board and had conspired against the captains life"; he is certain that Mackshane is to blame (148). Just as Smollett is about to embroil the reader in the shipboard politics, however, the overarching story of war returns quickly to the forefront. Roderick finds himself the unwitting witness to senseless and power-hungry slaughter.



"A New and Correct Plan of the Harbour of Carthagena in America" (Chassereau, 1740).

HIGHLIGHTING THE HUMAN FODDER OF INTEREST

The Battle of Cartagena is the looming backdrop of Roderick's adventures onboard the *Thunder*, and Smollett's narrative personalizes the loss of men and ships that its leader, General Vernon, attempted to mask with his official report to the King. The battle itself is minor in history and considered a mistaken detour from the larger goals of The War of Jenkins' Ear. This is in large part because it was a moment of embarrassment born entirely of England's desperation to own Spain's colonies in Jamaica, Cartagena, and other large ports. Smollett's own later narrative, "An Account of the Expedition against Carthagene" (1756), gives a detailed account of the many stages where lives were lost to disinterest and self-aggrandizement. Smollett details his experience in a detached third-person voice, from his ship's departure in August of 1740, to its disheartened and depleted sailing back to England the following April.

The first loss of life is a glimpse of the unthinking horrors sailors like Smollett would experience at the hands of more powerful men. Having entered the West Indies by the third week of December 1740, the fleet of one hundred eighteen ships encounters a French squadron of five ships. Admiral Vernon sends five of his own to intercept them—it wouldn't do for Spain to get word of the English plans in advance. The two squadrons fire artillery at each other all night, until the English commodore, realizing his squadron had no chance of escaping unscathed, "hailed his antagonist, and pretended he had mistaken them for Spaniards; the battle ws forthwith suspended, mutual compliments passed, and having treated each other with great marks of politeness" ("Exposition" 375).

Here, the language of friendship is employed to erase the embarrassment of over one hundred deaths in this skirmish. Smollett's description remains focused on a dispassionate chronicling of events, but Roderick's experience of the battle is visceral, as he is caged on the deck throughout.

Simply living through the death and devastation they've seen before they reach their destination puts Roderick and all of his friends on edge:

> Thomson, foreseeing that the whole slavery of attending the sick and wounded, as well as the cruelty of Mackshane, must now fall upon his shoulders, grew desperate at the prospect, and, though I never heard him swear before, imprecated dreadful curses on the heads of his oppressors, declaring that he would rather quit life altogether than be much longer under the power of such barbarians. (149)

Thomson, disgusted with the workload of his position, and even more so with Dr. Mackshane's cruelty, has no reservations about stealing sympathy from the enslaved. His despair disarms Roderick, but he can do nothing from his deck cage: "Next morning, when the hour of visitation came round, the unhappy young man was missing, and, after strict search, supposed to have gone overboard in the night; and this was certainly the case" (150). The reader and Roderick are left to assume that the horror of caring for war-torn bodies is more than Thomson could bear. Smollett's blistering account of the mission makes clear how deeply these deaths were the responsibility of the battle's leadership—its greatest downfall:

> It is a melancholy truth, which however ought to be told, that a low, ridiculous, and pernicious jealousy subsisted between the land and sea officers during this whole expedition; and that the chiefs of both were so weak or wicked as to take all opportunities of thwarting and manifesting their contempt for each other, at a time when the interest and honour of their country required the utmost zeal and unanimity…and while each of them piqued himself upon doing barely as much as would screen him from the censure of a court-martial, neither seemed displeased at the neglect of his colleague; but, on the contrary, both were in appearance glad of the miscarriage of the expedition, in hope of seeing one another stigmatized with infamy and disgrace. In a word, the admiral was a man of weak understanding, strong prejudices, boundless arrogance, and over-boiling passions; and the general, tho' he had some parts, was wholly defective in point of experience, confidence, and resolution. (382)

Lieutenant General Wentworth led the land forces, while Vice Admiral Vernon led the naval engagement. As Smollett shows here, the two were unfit in many ways for the experience, but the worst evidence is their willingness to spite each other at the expense of those they command. This was a battle that everyone expected to win, so much that medals had already been cast in celebration. The participants had not counted on their own hubris being more destructive than Admiral Blas who, known as "el Medio Hombre" for having lost an arm, eye, and leg in his career, was one of Spain's most intimidating figures and is still considered the true hero of this battle by the people of Colombia.

Despite the English crown's insistence that the Battle of Cartagena, though little noticed, was an honorable engagement, it is clear from Smollett's account that the fallen soldiers' opinions were never taken into account.[5] Smollett praises Blas' leadership yet allows Admiral Vernon no honors, making a clear statement that, at least for the English, this was an engagement motivated by personal interest and animosity. Smollett's anger also highlights how the Eurocentric conception of progress will, because of its feudal beginnings, always require an invisible and unthanked workforce whose survival requires them to express their gratefulness to the very system that represses them—discontent of any kind is unpatriotic and quickly squelched, because their service is always to the imagined nation. In the history of America, native bodies are purposely forgotten, lest they remind us of what was stolen. Black bodies, forced to migrate and treated as capital, continued to persist in such strength that population control was and is mandated by the state. These are truths that theorization frequently obfuscates in the hunt for nuance, and they are all visible as Roderick travels in search of his rightful inheritance as a gentleman of means.

Smollett's account of English soldiers dying of yellow fever as they slowly retreat from their failed mission highlights how the powerful (here Admiral Vernon and General Wentworth) treat the average man like a frivolous pawn. His critique does not, however, extend to the transatlantic slave trade's devastating effects on its black victims.

[5] In 2014 Phillip, Prince of Wales and wife Camilla Parker-Bowles visited Cartagena to place a plaque in honor of Admiral Vernon and his fleet; as the *New York Times* notes, the plaque was destroyed within days and its destroyer became a local hero for protecting Don Blas' reputation (Neuman).

Transforming black bloodlines into expendable slave labor was a shared pursuit between England and Spain, and the War of Jenkins' Ear was ultimately a fight for the freedom to do as they wished, with expendable soldiers, on land to which they were never entitled. Both Smollett's narrative and Roderick's adventures mention the presence of negroes throughout this failed occupation, but they are portrayed as tools rather than as human presences in this narrative. They are bodies made for and into profit. Smollett's choice of emotional distance is one that white people around the world have weaponized into anti-blackness on a global scale: "from the very beginning of Europe's contact with the Americas, writers deployed various discourses of conquest grounded in classical notions of friendship and in what I call its obverse, a theory of natural slavery" (Schweitzer 53). This theory undergirded chattel slavery, which turned blackness and its inheritance into a life defined as property worth as much value as the market would allow. Though Thomson once compared himself to the enslaved, the metaphor is clearly one of sensibility and not reality; to be chattel is to be insensible and therefore beneath sympathy.

Smollett's nonfiction description of the Battle of Cartagena ends with the loss of life and morale on the national stage, but his fictional protagonist, though horrified by its fallout, quickly recovers from the emotional weight of others' suffering. Thomson's suicide overboard, it turns out, was averted by a school-friend and fellow North Briton who, finding him adrift and desperate for help hours later, sympathized with Thomson's miserable desertion and treatment at the hands of the English. Thomson had since lived in

Jamaica with a far more pleasing job than the Navy—he worked "in quality of surgeon and overseer" to the plantation of a gentleman of fortune (176). Importantly, the final chapter of Volume One narrates the happy reunion of Roderick and Thomson and the celebration of their continued friendship. They express words of affection, as expected, but Thomson's most lasting show of friendship is through the transferal of financial interest at the very end of the volume. Black people, turned into bodies and then into profit, are the reason that Roderick's adventures in the first volume end so well. Thomson, well-off from his job as overseer, surprises Roderick with "half a dozen fine shirts, and as many linen waistcoats and caps, with twelve pair of new thread-stockings" (178). This is the wardrobe of a true gentleman, a colonial inheritance that he can take back to England and, like so many other men, build the empire fit for his progeny.

Chapter 2

Imagining the American Republic: Wifely Submission as White Supremacy in Susanna Rowson's *Reuben and Rachel*

> As to title, both my brother Auberry and his wife Rachel, join with me to renounce them; they are distinctions nothing worth, and should by no means be introduced into a young country, where the only distinction between man and man should be made by virtue, genius, and education. Our sons are true-born Americans, and while they strive to make that title respectable, we wish them to possess no other.
>
> Susanna Rowson

Reuben and Rachel, published in 1798, ends with Reuben's grand renunciation of the European familial ties and titles he and his twin sister Rachel possess in favor of the uniquely American identity of "virtue, genius, and education" (368). The passage encapsulates many themes of the Early Republic: nationality as brotherhood, symbolic inheritance, and individual fortitude. It is also a story of hybridity and kinship that evolves over three centuries, always with an eye toward manifest destiny and the inheritance earned by the hard work of Christopher Columbus. As the republic coalesced and grew, its citizens began to wrestle with the implications of their perceived birthright to the native-occupied land by romanticizing its theft as a fateful discovery. Susanna Rowson's novel is important because its march through time centers women as the literal incubators and doulas for America's great birth.

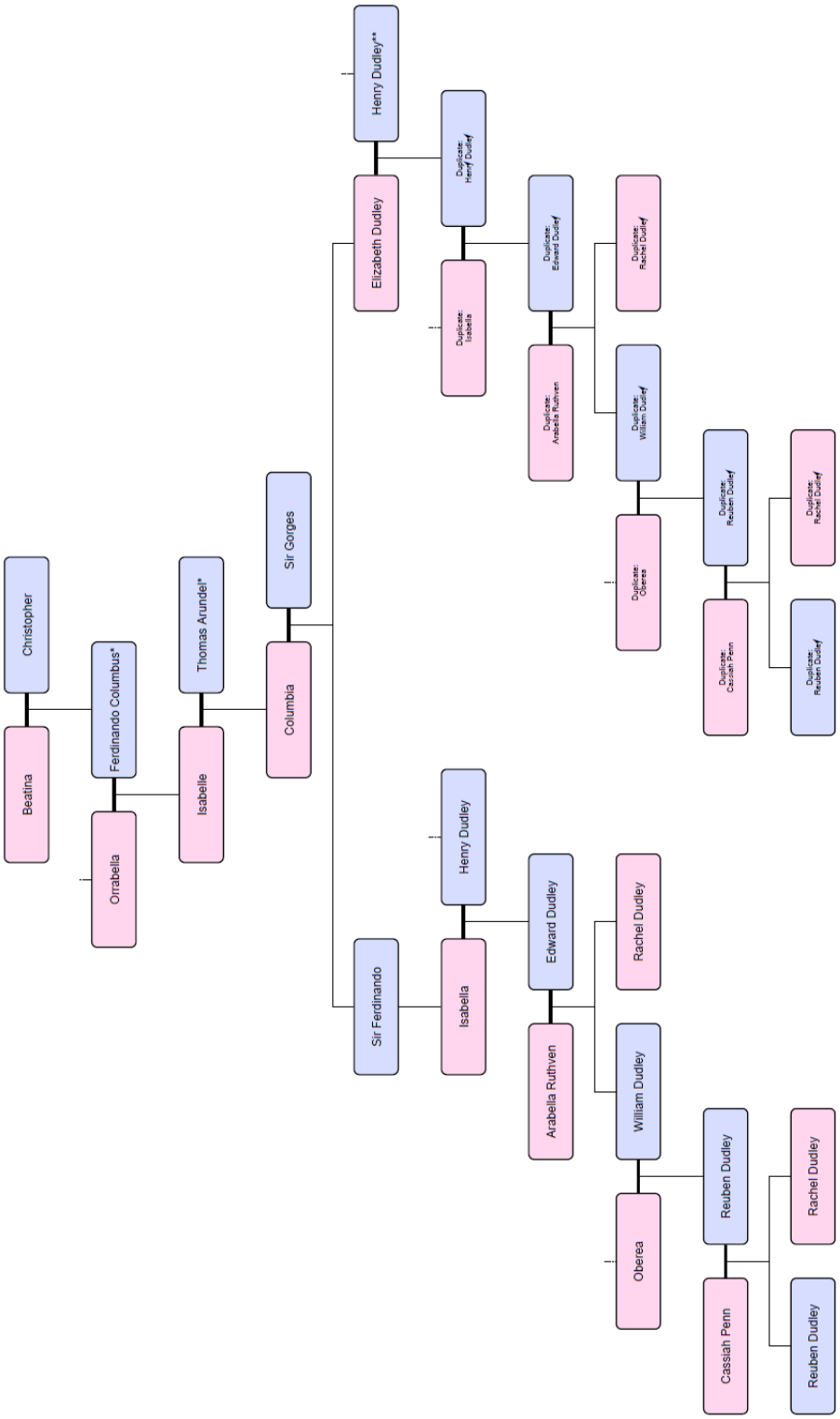
Rowson's "tale of old times" begins with the Columbian exchange and is told primarily through the perspectives of the family matriarchs. Rowson's fictionalization of this family's history begins from the moment Christopher Columbus sets sail on his first

voyage to the Americas. In a show of goodwill to Peruvian king Orrozombo, Columbus' son Ferdinando marries Princess Orrabella, affirming Europe's genealogical connection to this "new" continent from the beginning. Thenceforth, each generation adds a layer of mystique, survival, and nobility to the family heritage, even as their decisions result in difficulties that haunt their progress to greatness. Columbus' granddaughter Isabella marries an English protestant whose fortunes during Mary Tudor's reign lead them to the crumbling castle where the novel's first pages take place. This also makes her daughter Columbia's search for a happy marriage difficult, as her prospects dwindle alongside her financial interests. Although Columbia finds safety in Elizabethan England, only two of her children survive to adulthood—a son who inherits the title and a daughter who marries Henry Dudley, the fictional son of Lady Jane Grey and heir to her unclaimed majesty. This marriage, though fraught with danger from Henry's ability to challenge the throne of Elizabeth I, is satisfying but short, leaving Columbia's daughter Elizabeth with a son and no title.

The junior Henry Dudley and his cousin, reflexively named Isabella, both raised on the intrepid spirit of their forbears, defy their families and marry each other; here Rowson makes clear that incest is an adventurous detour to be avoided when building one's family legacy. Perhaps this is why the cousins' son Edward leaves England with dissenting Protestants to pioneer the American continent—though his departure does not keep the sins of the father from being visited on his sons and grandsons. The Dudley family is now living at Plymouth Plantation in Massachusetts, when the two youngest

children, William and Rachel, are captured during a raid. William and Rachel's colonial captivity narrative ends in his death at his father's hand, after William had become chief of the tribe that enveloped him. His wife, queen Oberea, returns to England with their son Reuben. Reuben's marriage to Cassiah Penn, whose character is steeped with Quaker heritage and the ideological ownership of America's Philadelphian birthplace, results in the twins that dominate the second volume and the novel's title—Reuben and Rachel.

Reuben and Rachel is often read as a proto-feminist reflection on white women's social captivity in the New Republic, for its unflinching portrayals of the pitfalls women must learn to avoid early in their lives are shown to have generational repercussions. Rowson herself opened a girls' boarding school in Boston during the year prior to this novel's release, so the novel's regular didactic asides to young women are an advertisement of the values her education would bestow. This was a school for *American* girls, so Rowson pulls her lessons from the women whose impeccable virtue led their families to the American dream. Their occasional failures she portrayed as due to an innocence that modern republican women could not afford. Information is power, and as post-revolutionary fervor died, white women were frustrated to have their circle of influence constricted to the private sphere. This frustration permeates sentimental fiction of the period, and this novel's second half is no exception. The first half's focus on genealogy is a reminder that the republic would be impossible to achieve without the generative power of white women's bodies. It is a meditation on birthright and fortitude



Family Tree of *Reuben and Rachel*

leading from Queen Isabella of Spain to Rachel Auberry née Dudley. In some moments this fortitude is conflated with the horrors indigenous people faced when encountering white men—their constant struggle for recognition creating a false sense of shared victimhood in white republican women.

There are three centuries of family history in the text, littering it with repeated names and complex relationships. Although the first volume indicates the wide genealogical scope of the narrative, Columbus' great-granddaughter Columbia is its only true main character. She is a young woman of sixteenth-century English nobility, growing into a family matriarch during the fraught Tudor succession crisis. She is the product of her family's greatness and her choices reverberate for generations: she is the crux of Rowson's national myth and a symbolic white female body actively securing European control of the American continent. The titular twins inherit her earth as they inherit her narrative in the second volume. Whether Rowson wrote the novel's conclusion as a feminist critique or a vision of destiny manifested is unclear, but the overall tale shows white women's myriad roles in reinforcing racial supremacy. Patriarchal friendships are sealed with their bodies, kept virginal by preemptive vigilance and maternal intuition. Pure bodies need a pristine continent to inhabit; who wouldn't go to any lengths for the woman they love? Their silence is acceptance, always, of the material conditions that undergird their comfort. In the novel as in life, white supremacy cannot be reckoned with until white women are prepared to repudiate the life or death consequences tied to their emotional expressions.

I read this novel as a snapshot of white feminism's beginnings: the moments when their fear of missing out on power begat personae whose vocal displeasure with white men's colonization hid their tacit enjoyment of the harms perpetrated for their sake. White women were the true power behind colonization, and their anger centers on the recognition they have not received.[6] Unlike Christopher Castiglia, who sees Rowson protesting the horrors colonialism wreaks on all, I read *Reuben and Rachel* as a guidebook to Eurocentric futurity. Any racial hybridity is used by future generations for cultural capital in the burgeoning Republic: armed with the dark skin and unrestricted movement they inherited, the titular characters belong on this continent and use the noble distinctions gained in transatlantic resource grabs to purchase their very own Manifest Destiny. Nobility is not a factor in the New World if you have the privilege to renounce it. Rowson's characters are not down on their luck, and there is no rags to riches story. It is not the story of the average American, but of the best American. It begins with Christopher Columbus, and the family remains near the epicenter of Western development and expansion.

In this chapter, I disambiguate the term "friendship" as it's used to define and facilitate the white family, a departure from the previous chapter's focus on male-centric notions of who constitutes kin. I use this term to specifically highlight the true goal of white supremacy—its actions are patriarchal, but all are based in protecting and

[6] White women's anger has been highlighted more recently as Donald Trump's disrespect has led them to protesting as they haven't since the suffrage movement. See Weber, "Feminist Rage"; Ahmed, *feministkilljoys*; Rodriguez and Boahene, "The Politics of Rage."

preserving the conceptual white family. In Rowson's didactic motivations, I read the uneasy self-definition of white women whose declaration of rights effects empathy with the colonized body before sacrificing that body in favor of sociocultural privilege. In a heteropatriarchy, white women mask their violence as a mother's need to protect her children. White women's relationships with each other, represented here in the choices that Rowson's women make, are foundational to the American experiment.[7]

I will be looking at a few specific friendships in this novel as case studies for three distinct modalities of white supremacy: patriarchal control, white female education, and sentimental genocide. All of these were necessary to the continued development of global capitalism, and all are centered in the symbolism of white female survival. Many of these friendships involve white female silence. This chapter ultimately claims that white female silence is a weapon of mass destruction, that their protest is always born of personal resentment, and that their friendships with marginalized people have historically ended where their own comforts began. In reading Rowson's formulations of sustained transatlantic friendship, I also theorize on the birth of white America, feminism, and indigenous erasure through white women's performed compassion.

The relationship between white men and women is undoubtedly coercive, but it has its pleasures. What happens when we reframe white women writing in the early republic to identify a larger intended audience? Abigail Adams famously asked her

[7] For more on the way that white women shaped colonialism and modern feminist discourse, see Syed, "The White Woman's Burden."

husband to negotiate the freedoms that republican women expected, writing on March 31, 1776,

> I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.

This is read as proto-feminist moment for many reasons, but to me the most important is the sense of historicity that Adams brings to her representation of ladies waiting to rebel—as though generations of women had taught each other to hold back from destroying the tyrants they served, while remaining ready to fight at the first sign that their work in service to the new American empire was underappreciated.

Taken in the context of colonized space however, it reads like an amusing performance of discord that will be abandoned at the white family's convenience. Rowson tries to combat the problem of unsubstantiated ownership with her two moments of hybridity, with consequences befitting the timeline. They don't serve to highlight the inherent diversity of the Americas' indigenous people prior to Columbus' arrival; rather, they provide just enough birthright to assuage the pressure of performance. Even here in

the twenty-first century, white people still want to be 1/16th Cherokee.[8] They dream of a personal hybridity that can tie them to land they know is not theirs. Reuben and Rachel are an eighteenth-century picture of this true American dream.

This is a chapter about the eighteenth-century birth of American exceptionalism, but it's also a meditation on how big the myth has grown. From its inception, white women have expressed discomfort with the terms of their gestational agreement. Middle- and upper-class white women have always led the charge for female equality, but their capacity for coalition-based action often ends when their pain is decentered. Other scholars of this novel have noted this almost without realizing it, while outlining the proto-feminist critiques Rowson sprinkles throughout. Castiglia writes that "by Rowson's standards, America's story is not one of increasing democracy and liberty but of growing misogyny and racism. As the American identity grows stronger, white women and Indians become increasingly more isolated and powerless, their captivities harder to escape" (141). This reading kindly allows Rowson the innocence of white womanhood by assuming her distaste for racism in order to read her symbolic motivations as sympathetic rather than sentimental. There is a long textual history of white women's disdain at being silenced, yet in their silence they choose the material conditions for their

[8] Elizabeth Warren, potential Democratic candidate for President, famously made claim to Cherokee heritage after being referred to as "Pocahontas" by current President Donald Trump. Three citizens of the Cherokee Nation—Adrienne Keene, Rebecca Nagle, and Joseph M. Pierce—published a syllabus in *Critical Ethnic Studies* detailing the history of erasure and colonialism these claims added to. They particularly noted how easily dominant society forgets the work that indigenous scholars are always already doing: "In the days after Warren released her DNA test results the demand from the media was such that scholar Kim Tallbear was forced to create a press release detailing the points she has made exhaustively since her writing on Native DNA began over a decade ago."

oppression. This novel shows the ease with which white women forgive the men they love, and therefore I ask: is white feminism in the American context anything other than a diversion? The lessons Rowson teaches young women here provides an insidious view of the presumed innocence white women pretend not to understand even as they wield it.

CONFRONTING THE ASSUMPTIONS OF WHITE WOMANHOOD

Criticism of the Early Republic and its female authors has revolved around the efficacy of sentimental plots in highlighting the rhetorical boundaries of their space—yet discussions of the public/private dichotomy that dominates the field generally stops before engaging those left on the outskirts of this spatial negotiation.[9] White women may have despised the requirements of the private sphere, but they always stop fighting those boundaries in time to retain the privilege of control. Home rule may have rankled, but it was necessary to the colonial project. White women were not fellow sufferers of colonial violence, but rather indirect perpetrators, all in service to their own safety. The Puritan mythology created an America formed despite, rather than because of, colonial violence. "The Puritan narratives…defin[ed] the American character by proclaiming the rejection of British culture" (Sieminski 36); their revolt against religious oppression was transcribed into a national bond around conceptual freedom. I say this because the basis of American identity is revolution, but the enemy of freedom is ever-changing: to be American is to sacrifice one's self for a political entity that protects from infringement

[9] See Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel, and Davidson, Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America.

and bestows your sense of predetermined individuality. Despite Rowson's stated desire to repudiate European values in service of American destiny, the novel betrays the colonial necessity of class and the confusion of making that class inherent in the necessary way of empire. Anglo-Americans were confounded by their need for the feudal structures that had sustained them through colonized life, thus replacing them with gratitude for the nation. This is a gratitude required of all citizens because "despite the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 7). This imagined horizontal structure provides a framework to reimagine the colonial narrative as a cooperative effort, where the native and indigenous people of the Americas merely made space and acceptance for this new nation being built in their name.

Rowson's characterizations of native interlocutors falls into a trope that Lisa Brooks calls "images of natives," wherein native bodies and symbols are cannibalized without considering the lived expressions of native people (*The Common Pot*). There are two major moments of hybridity in *Reuben and Rachel*: the first is a marriage between Ferdinando Columbus and Peruvian princess Orrabella that gives their descendants a birthright to the new world. The second is William Dudley's marriage to Oberea and his subsequent death during King Philip's war, which precipitates the family's return to England at the end of Volume One. In writing this analysis, I've been cognizant not to continue the novel's trope of pretending knowledge that is not mine to have. There are native scholars whose insights far exceed my own, and therefore I have made no effort to

represent Rowson's characters as accurate or even approximate depictions of their real-world counterparts. Instead, I am reading them for the faulty images they are and considering their function as sentimental propaganda for the American republic. Brooks writes, "the recovery of indigenous voices and indigenous knowledge is instrumental not only to the adaptation and survival of Native nations but to a deeper and more complex engagement with the past, present, and future landscape of America, however we might define it" (xxxix); I cannot do that in this chapter, and I have not tried. Rather, in considering the way Rowson imagines natives as interlopers or interlocutors, I have tried to understand the impulse that undergirds manifest destiny and its visions of security.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg sees representation of the fragmented American identity in Susanna Rowson's work, wondering "how could they have affirmed the cohesion of a subject irreconcilably divided between his affinity for a white, cultured Europe and his identification with the savage newness of the American continent" (504). Bartolomeo's introduction to the Broadview reprint is one of the few to actively wrestle with the story's treatment of its native characters through the centuries; regarding Eumea's drowning death in the final chapter, Bartolomeo concludes that "writing historical fiction offered Rowson the freedom to represent challenging and potentially subversive social relations and gender roles, as long as the past she portrayed remained relatively distant" (31). Smith-Rosenberg arguably claims Rowson's experiment a success, writing, "Rowson presents an American subject constituted through fusion, not confusion" (497). I argue that Rowson's novel is not about cohesion, but rather enclosure, erasure, and

replacement. Understanding this fragmentation is necessary to defining the terms of female friendship in a patriarchal context, and how that friendship depends affectively on the sisterhood of surviving white maleness.

PATRIARCHAL FRIENDSHIP

Published only twenty-two years after the Declaration of Independence was signed, Rowson's characterization of America's inheritors prioritizes honor, friendship, and an indomitable spirit. This novel is her attempt to codify the knowledge necessary to a young American woman of noble history, but it also served as a calling card to American parents—here Rowson promises an inherited future for their daughters that inextricably links them to this land and its boundless opportunity. Rowson is teaching them their necessary role as progenitors of colonial inheritance: white women must be protected, revered, and sacrificed for, because their fruit will inherit the earth. The two moments of hybridity in this text serve to lessen tension at cultural contact points, a technique used by white men as the buffer from the desired but unintended consequences of their actions. In a novel about matriarchs, Orrozombo and Columbus stand out as the intrepid progenitors of their lineage. They share a nobility that Rowson makes recognizable, despite the language and cultural barriers between these men.

In a reminder of the true import of marriage, we learn of Orrozombo and Columbus' deepest wishes for their children: "Columbus looked forward to the union as a means of insuring wealth and power to his posterity, and Orrozombo imagined, by resigning his daughter to this young stranger, he secured to himself a powerful friend and

ally in Columbus" (63). The Columbus of this novel passes down an intrepid bravery that leads to positive intermarriages with native women that enrich each generation's claim to the land, but the narrative heavily emphasizes the women's innate ability to mimic the abilities and desires of a well-bred aristocratic wife. Although in reality Ferdinando was fifteen at the time of his father Columbus' 1498 voyage, Rowson's new timeline makes Ferdinando a twenty-six-year-old "gentleman of the first rank," the perfect age and reputation to find a wife of equal nobility. Princess Orrabella is not just his wife, but a necessary contributor to the family's progeny. Their romance leaves no affect on the page. Instead, it is the fathers, Orrozombo and Columbus, whose relationship is solidified through this marriage. The two men exchange access through blood, for the promise of progeny is the surest way to claim the land. The Spaniards teach Orrozombo's people "the useful arts; and Science," never minding that their palaces could not have stood for centuries unless the native people had already explored the sciences. Though they are recognizably noble and well-bred, they lack gunpowder—the sure signifier of civilization.

Though European noble lineage has its place in the text, Rowson's use of nobility is purposely broader. In this novel, the Columbus myth is the seat of nobility. Rowson carefully weaves her narrative from the roots of his arrival in the Americas, imbuing every future generation with some of his noble colonial spirit. Although Columbus is the family's patriarch, Rowson's storytelling carefully centers the women of the family as decision-makers, creating a narrative in which the responsibility for familial good

behavior lies on female shoulders. In exchange, they become the inspiration for man's most egregious accomplishments: Columbus writes that his most desired outcome for colonial expansion is to "seek out a kingdom of which my Beatina shall be queen" (55). This characterization of colonialism as a knight's quest illustrates the importance of white women to white supremacy—their needs become the catalyst for moments of justified violence in which their men have the blessing to enslave thousands in order that they might incubate American Identity.

Rowson's explicit ties between nobility and friendship are not new, but what makes Rowson and this novel distinctly transatlantic is her use of Eurocentric nobility tropes in the new world. Europeans, visiting the Americas and finding no gunpowder, extended the hand of friendship to help the uncivilized communities they found. If some are killed in this journey to betterment...well, that is merely the price of success. Here friendship is freely given, and the giver's judgment is never questioned despite the relationship's malevolent fruits. Rowson's nobility glorifies humility, which shifts attention away from the individual's achievement, leaves no explanation necessary, and politely prohibits further inquiry of the apparatus signifying these actions. In Columbus' letter to his son, he opines that "Avarice had discovered this new world was an inexhaustible mine of wealth; and…came with rapine, war, and devastation in her train" (63). Personified greed, rather than greedy people, are the destruction of this continent. Any damage done in the service of friendship or loyalty is justified. When the language

of friendship has always been feudal, and when one's fealty must always be productive, the horrors of colonial expansion become the responsibility of everyone and no one.

Soldiers invade in service to their leader, and leaders ignore the grim work of clearing or using "new" land through any means necessary by reveling in the fruits of colonized labor. When describing Roldan's revolt that ended in his return to Spain, Columbus repines for Orrozombo's court: "I greatly fear, whilst we were hospitably entertained at her father's court, we were ungratefully paving the way for the introduction of war, rapine, and destruction" (65). Even though the real Columbus never returned to colonial power, Rowson's Columbus is fully vindicated by King Ferdinand who charges him to "Go, valiant chief, and reign over a people, whom you have conquered by practising humanity, not the arts of war," and gives him unlimited power as viceroy of the colonies because "I know it is a power you will not abuse" (75). Columbus, the leader of these colonizing forces, is stripped of responsibility for the failings of his people, even as his leadership remains intact. This Rowson explains away with an invective against Roldan, Garcias and their followers in a way that names Peruvian culture as idolatry, but a lesser sin: "But the Peruvians were idolaters! cried the misguided enthusiast; and so was Garcias and his followers; their idols were avarice, ambition, luxury, and lawless passion; to them they bent the knee, and on their altars did they sacrifice millions of innocent people.—But I digress," (83). Although Rowson's narrative voice locates the failure of colonialism in greed and luxury, it also decenters the systematic greed for resources and

labor, placing the responsibility for millions of Indigenous American deaths in the hands of a few unworthy transplants.

The next exploration of hybridity is outwardly less violent, its violence is tied to the Protestant American mythology that arrived on the Mayflower. William Dudley mirrors his ancestors through friendship with Otooganoo, first as a servant and later, as son-in-law and successor. In telling his story, Rowson edits the classic captivity narrative. Edward Dudley and his family, now settled in Plymouth, are torn apart by a raid from the local Narragansett people. He and his sister Rachel are stolen away, then sold to an eastern tribe as safety precaution for the attackers. Rowson expresses some sympathy for the "party of plunderers," noting that the genocide they have suffered "must certainly awaken a spirit of revenge in the bosom of persons better regulated than those of untutored savages." However, she characterizes these horrors as the work of "two or three unprincipled and licentious Europeans," implying that Edward Dudley, "a man of *peace*," was the wrong locus for their revenge (172).

By 1674, young William has grown to nineteen years of age and takes the mantel of tribal leader as King Phillip's War begins to rage. In the intervening thirteen years between his capture and his tribal leadership, William becomes a learning guide to Otooganoo, so that "from the effects of [William's] instructions, his protector had made rapid advances towards civilization, had entirely lost his natural ferocity, and attained such a degree of rational information as made him a pleasant companion" (181). William is only six when stolen. He is brought up near the Newport colony with little knowledge

of Europe, and yet his information is enough to transform this chief into a friend that any white man could be proud of. What education is a small child capable of providing? We may accept at face value the narrative convention of captive white children whose purity remains despite years of reeducation, but this trope infantalizes Otooganoo and underlines the superior European sophistication that William has supposedly maintained through his captivity.

The education young William provides to the chief and his daughter Oberea has "rendered her unfit to match with any of her own countrymen," implying that with civilization comes enlightenment and evolution, which must then be followed by seclusion (183). Civilization then is not a static way of being, but rather a conceptual attempt by European colonizers to justify cultural proselytizing. Unlike the black Spanish legend represented by figures like Roldan, who invaded selfishly and slayed natives indiscriminately, this moment of hybridity comes about through English colonial innocence. It is supposedly the high quality of Oberea's education that persuades Otooganoo to offer her in marriage to William. Naming him the next chief, for the sake of democracy, Otooganoo urges, "supply my place, govern my people, direct them by your wisdom, teach them the real value of well-constructed laws, encourage them in studying the arts of war" (183). This illustrates how thoroughly whiteness depends on ignoring or eradicating knowledge that cannot be turned toward imperial will.

THE PEDAGOGY OF WHITE WOMANHOOD

The underlying necessity of this novel is Rowson's reputation as an educator. Its didactic nature comes from the narrator's voice, but even more so from the conversations the novel's women share. Knowledge is passed down to daughters and young female friends in a diffuse mentorship structure that defines matriarchal leadership. The women are joined in their need to survive in a man's world, desperate to lean in to the epicenter of cultural power. After all, women in the revolutionary period were fighting for a life in the public sphere, to be in the spaces where influence and control were seized. The novel's distinctive halves are unified by this didactic attention to young women, paying particular attention to the pitfalls of self-definition in a still-undefined country. Susanna Rowson lived a thoroughly transatlantic life: born in London and raised in Philadelphia, Rowson regularly crossed the Atlantic for family and financial stability. Her personal experience of early America was one where a traveling actress could settle down near Boston and teach respectable young women without the social censure of England's rigid boundaries. Indeed, as the rising costs of performance began to bankrupt the troupe she and her husband performed with, she made the decision to leave acting and turn toward the education of young girls.

White women teach each other how to survive in a white man's world, rarely examining their personal dedication to creating those white men. Occasionally they band together to renegotiate the terms of their labor and remind men of their necessity, but their action only occurs when the social disruption distracts them from luxuriating in their

passive (and thus more enjoyable) role in imperial violence. For white women, imperial violence is forgivable until it is personal. There is no such thing as a white sisterhood because the needs of the white heteropatriarchy and its reassuring protection will always take precedence over collective freedom.

There are many relationships between women that deserve unpacking throughout the text, but the friendships between Columbia and Mina, and between Rachel and Jessy Oliver, illustrate the fluid definitions and modalities of white sisterhood. In Columbia and Mina we see a friendship born of feudal impulses. In a show of her inherent good virtue, Isabelle tells the story of young Columbia encountering then-homeless Mina on an unlikely walk through impoverished London. Struck by the beautiful child in such base conditions, Columbia immediately offers her the friendship of lady's maid. It is an interesting position for its level of implied intimacy. On one hand, it is an elevation beyond a peasant child's expected knowledge. A lady's maid is far from a social equal, yet she would likely have a more intimate knowledge of her mistress than anyone else in her life. Lady's maids helped with bathing, clothing, and were the bastion of order between a noblewoman's attire and the prying eyes of the public. Lady's maids took care of unseemly tasks, like exchanging romantic letters and facilitating assignations. This is the work of an intimate friend, but this friend must be paid to do it. A friend of one's own social standing has no motivation to keep your secrets—indeed, she may have the means to ruin your life with them. Far better to have a friend who you imagine is grateful for your attention and loyal to a fault—and to a paycheck.

Columbia, named for her ancestor's greatest discovery and the central figure of the first volume, is shown at first through the eyes of her carefully instructive mother. Indeed, Columbia's childhood is described in such detail that the reader learns the best approaches to develop a lady's decorum, judgment, and sense of humility. This shows in Rowson's choice to put the story of their first meeting in the hands of Cora, once a young attendant to Princess Orrabella and now the elderly attendant to her granddaughter Isabelle, mother to Columbia. Widowed, destitute, and yet of "noble spirit," Columbus' granddaughter and her daughter Columbia have been reduced to the crumbling Gothic castle where Rowson's tale begins. Rather than following a rigid chronology through the generations, the narrative uses oral and written histories to recollect early generational memories, leading to Cora's retelling of events generations old. Cora, an elderly woman recollecting her first childhood encounter with Europeans, is the perfect cipher for the colonial imaginary that Rowson builds around Columbia's noble inheritance: of the colonial ships, she remembers "a monstrous fish or bird" frightening all with the "burst of fire and smoke issued from its side, with tremendous noise" (61).

A focus on vanity is the epicenter of Rowson's pedagogy, and the strong women of the family are successful because of their early disavowals of its charms. Eleven-year-old Columbia's first object lesson from her mother comes while she gazes like Narcissus at her beautiful reflection in a nearby stream; ruining the reflection with a stone, Isabelle admonishes her daughter that "beauty itself is but a shadow, scarce seen before it is gone; and that fair semblance you there behold is but the shadow of a shade" (45). Physical

beauty can be stolen in a moment and brings no eternal satisfaction, requiring one to focus on the beauty that entices God, the most important beholder. Isabelle's recipe for salvation requires "the soul, studious to perform its duty, beneficent to its fellow creatures, and glowing with grateful, humble affection to the great First Cause of all," and this reminder becomes Columbia's strongest deterrent against wrongdoing (47).

Mina's promotion gives her the opportunity to learn the same lessons that enlighten Columbia, yet it leaves her in the social middle ground where Sir James Howard, pretend suitor and protector to the family, easily absconds with and impregnates her. Though the blame for her death is felt by all, Rowson reminds the reader that the fault should lay entirely at Mina's feet. On her child- and deathbed, Mina emphasizes her involuntary removal from Lady Isabelle's care, but the women nonetheless agree that her miserable end is just punishment for her original sin of vanity. Columbia exclaims at how "severely thou hast suffered for thy deviation from the path of rectitude," yet Mina calmly exclaims her only remaining hope—"that my sufferings are nearly at an end, and that they have in part atoned for my errors" (145). A girl who was elevated from peasant to lady's maid through the friendship of nobility, her error was one of class; if she fails to imbue the noble values she was freely allowed to access, why should the blame fall elsewhere? Mina's end highlights the genetic requirement of nobility: all the education in the world was insufficient to overcome her ignoble beginnings.

In the second volume, Rachel's sentimental journey keeps her separate from Jessy Oliver, "friend of my heart," for most of her misadventures. They meet, as well-raised

noblewomen do, through their brothers' school friendship; the connection between their brothers would have allowed for more frequent and lengthy interactions, traveling to each other on their brothers' whims. Jessy differs greatly from Rachel in her unwillingness to submit to any societal rules imposed by her nobility. She shows an early infatuation for Reuben that is stalled when her father arranges a more appropriate marriage on her behalf, but rather than submitting she absconds to the country and works for her living. Rachel's strongest personality trait, "her excessive anxiety to see others happy, made her inattentive to the means of promoting or preserving her own happiness," a narrative observation that holds true in her every interaction (197). Jessy Oliver embodies Rowson's optimal woman in ways that Rachel, despite her virtue, repeatedly fails at. One of these failures is in her ill-fated marriage to Hamden Auberry, a man who lacks strength and fortitude yet is allowed to mature toward the American destiny his children inherit. Hamden Auberry represents the weak nobility that the novel's second half slowly rejects on its way across the Atlantic, but his sins are laid on Rachel's unassuming head. Here again lies the conundrum of colonialism—a woman's job is to develop the qualities that justify European inheritance of the continent, while the man's job is merely to propagate and destroy. His job is to raze the institutions on which his wife and descendants will build their dream. The destruction is insidious because it is framed through the benign image of family and progeny. Without white womanhood, the family could not exist. Of course, the patriarchy works by coercing female bodies into reproduction at all costs, but all coercion is not alike. White women have learned that weakness has its advantages.

White women must speak about their experience of gendered coercion because it is easier than confronting how much white supremacy depends on their literal bodies.

Unwilling to answer Mrs. Webster's inquiries regarding her new living space, Rachel claims accountability "to no one for my actions; and whilst my own heart acquits me of any breach of my duties either moral or religious, I am perfectly indifferent as to what opinion the world in general may form concerning me" (277). Though it is nobly delivered, Rachel's idealism is ultimately her downfall: a woman's reputation is everything, and Rowson didactically admonishes, "it is not only necessary to be virtuous, but to appear so…the semblance is often more respected than the reality" (277). Rowson's primary goal is education, and here she shows one of the great conundrums of female virtue: you may be blameless in god's eyes, but it will not save you from societal degradation. Rachel's refusal to appear virtuous brings her slowly to the edge of destruction. Hamden's "false pride…was his only foible," and his false reasoning of Rachel's needs "was in reality an unwillingness to give up the respect, the parade, the ease and conveniences, wealth is ever certain to insure" (316). His only foible is, of course, one of humanity's greatest faults, even though Rachel's fault is merely in assuming the best of humanity.

Rowson reminds us repeatedly that "The greatest and almost only fault of our heroine was a too great openness of disposition, in regard to her own circumstances or business" (323). Prudence grows out of one's consciousness of evil, something Rachel never grasps. Her purity of heart is an asset incompatible with existence in society, and

Rowson's disgust here is toward the social requirements imposed on women in order to survive. Women must always match their behavior to a man's expectations—this is the basis of cultural modesty. Rowson's aggravation toward men's disavowal of briefly inconvenient women is clear: "who will espouse the cause of an injured wife, when he who has solemnly sworn to protect her from all evil, listens with avidity to the voice that defames her, and joins with her worst enemies to precipitate her into the abyss of ignominy?" (335) Rachel's best qualities—self-reliance, fortitude, kindness, and her willingness to give—become her downfall in a societal structure that expects deference: "She feared not the censures of a world which, though she would not willfully offend, she was but little solicitous to please" (336). Unfortunately, in doing so she loses the good opinion of her dissipated husband, who leaves her to penury and death with no communication of his anger or her failures.

Dr. Lenient vilifies his nephew's behavior as that of "a man who had wantonly sacrificed [Rachel's] happiness and reputation on the altar of ambition and self-interest" (352). Leniency for male error, it appears, is not acceptable to even the most forgiving patriarch. Manifesting destiny requires destruction of kinships for the larger goal of supremacy, but always for the sake of perpetuity. This is the reason that colonizers can never be immigrants—rather than yearning for a new home, they yearn for a larger stage to prove their worthiness for power. New lands contain obstacles or resources, not communities and kinship. White supremacy is built on these willful slippages, and on the

conviction that civilization and science were worthy reparations for the unwitting genocide occasioned by progress.

The Labor Pains of Sentimental Genocide

Reuben and Rachel, the Dudley twins, are the genetic culmination of their family's noble heritage, yet Rowson quickly notes that they "were by no means superior to the generality of children of their age and condition," particularly in knowing that "crying vociferously they could obtain almost any thing" (195). After a volume of epic exploits, Rowson takes care to prepare the reader for a more relatable sentimental adventure. The twins are born with noble and historically significant blood. Their journey to America is filled with obstacles, but it is always inevitable. Their success is not their own; it is the result of generational work intent on maintaining generational wealth and noble lineage. Reuben and Rachel aren't particularly special, Rowson reminds the reader regularly as she details their changing fortunes. Their importance is not as individuals, but rather as potential. Rowson herself seems unconcerned with the twins, repeatedly using extended didactic monologues and philosophical musings while hurrying through the recitation of their actions. Their experiences are lessons for the reader, and their fortunes metaphorically mirror the successful colonial experience. Reuben and Rachel both end the novel in happy marriages and as parents to America-born children, their journeys different but equally strenuous.

Their chosen spouses are also very different—Jessy Oliver is replete with talent and intellect while consistently choosing her own destiny; Hamden Auberry, on the other

hand, seems to hold value purely through his existence. Their happy ending of American exceptionalism attempts to masquerade the disturbing story of Eumea, whose love for Reuben combines romance and gratitude in an unequal combination. This inequality is the biggest difference from the previous sites of cultural hybridity that Rowson chronicled earlier. Individuality is essential to Manifest Destiny, but solitude is not. One must have connections to family and friends, for the goal of the individual must always be the furthering of collective destiny. While Rachel's path to happiness was littered with traps for the unsuspecting young woman and her reputation, Reuben's tale once again rewrites the captivity narrative as literal and financial, this time as he becomes a prisoner of war.

Reuben is captured because he joins a Pennsylvania militia that, like many, spent most of their time in "several rencounters with the Indians, and…they had driven and pursued them a farther distance into the country than they imagined" (298). Reuben withstands his captivity by dreaming and imagining scenes of reunion with Jessy and Rachel. Rowson frames this section as an unfortunate pause in Reuben's upward trajectory, yet he is quite literally caught in the act of conquest: his captors act out of self-defense as their land is stolen and their leaders held captive. This particular engagement happens because the most recent raids had resulted in capture for a group of local chiefs; Wampoogahoon's actions were retaliatory. In calling Reuben's captors "children of nature," Rowson evokes the common Enlightenment belief that true civilization is a constant striving for distance between oneself and a so-called primitive state. Reuben

claims he "had seen too much of savage men and manners to have a wish to remain amongst them, even though he might have been elevated to the highest seat of dignity" (302). He therefore gives up his childhood dream of leading his native kin, supposedly because of his mistreatment in captivity.

Even in her created images of natives, the stakes Rowson provides for Reuben's mistreatment reveal the lie of their supposed savagery. Wampoogahoon clearly states in English that "he meant to detain them till the captured Indians were returned safely," a recognizable statement of their position as diplomatic hostages, not just prisoners (304). The final chapter and Reuben's escape are necessitated because the Indian chiefs held by the Europeans had been guilty of a breach of the European laws, and in consequence had been put to death. Wampoogahoon vows to kill the Europeans in retaliation, a move that his daughter Eumea simply cannot bear. The death of the captured chiefs is relayed with matter-of-fact detachment, but this is explained by the narrator, who imagines Reuben's potential demise in similar circumstances as a horror-show of "inhuman tortures which none but savages could inflict, and none but savages submit to" (353). Just like that, the colonial message is laid out clearly: if the indigenous population of the Americas had really wanted to survive, they would have done something about their white visitors sooner. Since they waited too long to stake their claim, which of course requires a pen and paper contract—the colonizers' word means nothing and therefore they are all liars—it is the natives' own fault that they have been immolated or left for dead. The human impulse is to conquer, and indigenous Americans apparently failed that lesson. White

people, even in their own imagination, make treaties with native people that they never intended to keep. Their imagination cannot comprehend measuring success through communal benefit rather than capital gain.

Upon Reuben's escape, Eumea attempts to follow him to civilization largely due to her mother's insistence that she learn the ways of Europe. But not even her French mother's care for her European education can save Eumea from destruction. Her ties to the colonized subject betray her rational mind so that she cannot imagine herself in relation to him as an equal. Eumea's relationship to Reuben is doomed because only honorable self-immolation is acceptable—that is, her death is a rescue from far worse degradation; her desire to die for love of him is a moral weakness that means she could never survive. Eumea argues, "If the eyes are dimmed with tears and the heart oppressed with sorrow; is it a sin to seek that happy place where we can neither weep nor suffer more?" Reuben replies, "you have profited but little by my instructions, Eumea…if you can argue this" (356). Her failure is a lack of fortitude: survival is not passively attained because colonialism always attacks with violence. Eumea is therefore sacrificed to the turning cogs of the American dream.

Rowson's construction of nobility is muddied in the second volume as she grapples with the conversion of this noble heritage into ideals of independence and hard work that signify true American values. Where nobility in the first volume is a necessary component to the successful generations of their ancestry, the second volume views European nobility as an excuse to live a diverted and sumptuous life earned through

nothing but birth. Birthright matters significantly to Rowson, but the achievements of the individual are what separates the hardworking American with noble lineage from the lazy self-aggrandizement of noble life. The narrator opines, "Can any situation be more distressing, than that of a young man, of brilliant understanding, aspiring genius, laudable ambition and uncorrupted heart, thus deprived of every means of improving his fortune, or exerting his talents, in such a manner as might at once be advantageous to himself and society in general?" (297) This passage reveals the true object of colonial expansion—opportunity for men of brilliance to flourish. But what does brilliance mean? Europeans didn't bring science or knowledge to the rest of the world; they brought only their privilege and discord, their faulty understanding. The white family holds the illusion of civilization together. Killing for its own sake is barbarism, but killing while civilizing a continent is a worthy cause when women and children are at stake.

When Reuben's final monologue references "my brother Auberry, and his wife Rachel," it distinguishes the secondary role begrudgingly taken on by women of the republic. Rachel and Jessy could have lived as spinsters together, but their ultimate vision of happiness is so tied into white romantic futurity that they willingly cross the Atlantic and subordinate themselves to their chosen men. In the novel's closing scene, Rachel is not silenced; she has assimilated willingly in exchange for the success her sons have been promised. In this instance, Rowson's narrative illuminates the white female silence required to reach that reward. Whiteness is based in the family, but it is not communal. Rather, it is a workforce with benefits dependent on consistent job performance. Despite

the neoliberal aura of modern Eurocentric progress, it has feudal beginnings and depends on colonized bodies. Its success will always require an invisible and unthanked workforce who can only express gratitude to the system—succumbing to whiteness is believing your gratitude can save you. One critic concludes that the novel shows how deeply "the colonized and the white women both suffer from the absence of the other" (Castiglia 150). Another sees its weaving plot lines as "distinctive moral paintings of America…paintings in which white women and red men assume significantly different visages," its uncertainty representing the fragmented American identity (Smith-Rosenberg 504). These benevolent readings assume that Rowson intended to write a novel of dissent about the sentimentalizing of women, and that its culmination is a purposeful examination of America's failure of white women and natives, rather than the outcome desired by all who colonize.

Chapter 3

Friendship as Futurity:
Affirming Diasporic Kinship Through Phillis Wheatley's Poems

The Old South Meeting House is an imposing Georgian-style building having graced the streets of Boston since its completion in 1729. Attended by Samuel Sewell, the well-known diarist and a judge in the Salem Witch Trials, the Meeting House saw the beginnings of the American Revolution, serving as the rallying point for the now-infamous Boston Tea Party. Its membership logs showcase a range of important historical colonial figures, including Phillis Wheatley and the entire Wheatley family. It served as a house of worship as well. The main floor of the sanctuary houses traditional box pews: generational spaces rented by Boston's wealthy and prestigious, whose names are still registered in the attendance logs. Being enslaved, Phillis Wheatley would have worshiped in the balcony, a general mixture of "town" (read: house) slaves and the working poor of Boston. Named after the boat that forced her transatlantic crossing and the family who purchased her, Wheatley spent her Sunday mornings immersed in this sanctioned mingling of brown, black, enslaved, and impoverished bodies, partaking of the same sermons as their wealthy, white, and well-known owners and counterparts downstairs. The whispers exchanged and commiserations made possible in this liminal and shadowy space—its physical remove from the rest of the worship space rendering it simultaneously less holy, less awe-ful—leave no impressions on a written archive. Yet they wield an undeniable affective power. Imagine a young Phillis, leaning over to a

slightly younger black boy newly arrived in Boston. Perhaps she imparts knowledge of which merchants are trustworthy, or what facial expressions might get him whipped for insolence. Perhaps they shared brief careless moments talking about pastimes indulged during moments of leisure.

The ways to imagine friendships formed in the Meeting House balcony are as varied as the inhabitants of said space. I begin here because the architecture and significance of this congregation and its members perfectly illustrate the mélange of bodies and ideas that constituted Revolutionary-era Boston. Wheatley's poems are recognizably influenced by a neoclassical tradition, but in how they privilege relationships formed in the transatlantic space, their themes of diasporic longing and hope become visible. Wheatley's longing for peace comes through repeatedly in her 1773 book *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, but the necessity of affective communion to this vision becomes most apparent upon reading "To SM, a young African Painter, on Seeing his Works." There Wheatley describes her own sublime experience of viewing SM's paintings while simultaneously imagining a future where the two live in artistic communion in heaven's timeless landscape. I choose to identify the SM of Wheatley's poem as Scipio Moorhead, a fellow house slave in Boston whose owners were close friends with the Wheatley family. Moorhead has captured the imagination of literary critics investigating the origins of "To SM," but in this chapter I will focus on imagining the expansive potential of diasporic black friendship rather than the limitation of the individuals' circumstances. Like the shadowy depths of the balcony, the

transatlantic expanse is defined by the community formed at the beginnings of blackness as ethnicity—an identity that replaces the missing genealogical and national markers stripped away by enslavement while expanding the boundaries of legible kinship. Describing this identity and its attendant emotional resonance leads me to the black imaginary. I will show its connection to the affective work of the black theorists and scholars who came before me, in a chain of diasporic kinship.

What unfolds in this chapter is a kind of mapping—an attempt to record the relationships formed by and through Phillis Wheatley's words. Wheatley's varied epistolary correspondence shows her prioritization of transatlantic friendships, and her letters written to Obour Tanner, a fellow enslaved woman, highlight the distinct necessity of the eternal imaginary to Wheatley's conceptions of restorative spiritual kinship. Wheatley's work shows an understanding that, though their blackness was a deterrent to personal fulfillment in a white supremacist social order, the inherent community of blackness is both atemporal and geographically fluid. Cataloguing this relationship and its intimacy over distance creates space to imagine the depth of friendship between her and Scipio Moorhead, immortalized as poetic futurity in "To SM," and as visual biography in the only surviving portrait of Phillis Wheatley. In reading their works, the friendship between the poet and the painter highlights the abiding power of transatlantic blackness and reveals the painful yet edifying ways that black bodies reprocessed the forced culture of European incursion. More evidence for this form of transformative space persists through Wheatley's contemporaries, who wrote of their kinship with her

work in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. Ignatius Sancho's letter to the American who sent him *Poems* shows his moral rage at Wheatley's treatment; he imagines the eternal consequences and rewards waiting for slaveholders and their innocent victims. Jupiter Hammon, the first published black poet in the United States, in 1778 wrote "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley" that rings with the knowledge of righteous black futurity despite its admonitory tone. In addition to these Wheatley contemporaries who wrote across the transatlantic space, my final consideration is the continuing resonance of her work to twenty-first-century poet-scholars. Through poetry and letter writing, certain twenty-first century women illustrate the inspiration they find in Wheatley's friendships and in the internal affect that drove her poetic genius. In tracing this web of affective connection that centers on Phillis Wheatley, I show the power of shared memory and kinship in the formation of what is truly a diasporically-imagined transatlantic archive.

BLACK IMAGINARY FRIENDSHIP

Black friendship is a nod on the street. It's seeing another black body in a sea of whiteness, then meeting their eyes, your smile of hopeful relief mirrored on their familiar melanin. It's knowing that your daily suffering is not your fault; it is all projection; it is terror of darkness. The oppressive weight of your suffering is periodically lifted by reveling together in how beautiful blackness is and how our misery is only a result of externalized white existential misery. The comedy of this inescapable shared reality animates the space of the black imaginary. The term "black imaginary" is a linguistic

attempt to cohere a transatlantic space in which blackness is shared knowledge, and where affective connections grow with the barest care because there is no intimacy like epigenetic pain. This understanding of epigenetic pain—a pain passed down generationally—undergirds the work of critical race theorists like Toni Morrison and Paul Gilroy. Gilroy's monograph *The Black Atlantic* questions the whitewashed construction of academic Cultural Studies, begun by men like Edmund Burke and crystallized by theorists like Raymond Williams. While whitewashed Cultural Studies resulted in image of a "nationalist [and] ethnically absolute" cultural Englishness, its wider repercussion is a framework for cultural interpretation and narrative-building that prioritizes mastery over community (Gilroy 15). It is essential to Saidiya Hartman's work, where her chosen scenes of subjection "focus on the enactment of subjugation and the constitution of the subject" (4). Her focus highlights the small and daily moments that contained so much violence even as they nourished nuggets of resistance. In response to cultural studies theories, critical race theory allowed black scholars and thinkers to reclaim and resignify the narratives of blackness. As they accomplished this work, the lines connecting black bodies in a diasporic community became more legible. The forcible erasure of culture that occurred in the Middle Passage created an amalgam of the spiritual and the cultural, resulting in a blackness unconcerned with the national borders codified by European cultural theorists.

This lack of borders resonates across recent scholarly engagements with black trauma, performance, and queer fluidity in the aftermath of the Middle Passage. The

"spectacular opacity" of Daphne Brooks' *Bodies in Dissent* prioritizes performance to refuse and repudiate the colonial imagination of darkness. Instead, she imagines black bodies that "demonstrate the insurgent power of imaging cultural identity in grand and polyvalent terms which might outsize the narrow representational frames bestowed on them" (8). This interstitial energy culminates in the small self-assertions that survive bodily enslavement and find expression through art. The imaginative impulse is present in a 2014 Claudia Rankine-edited essay collection entitled *The Racial Imaginary*, which grew from an open forum website where scholars and authors of color considered the difficulty of crafting careful language to adequately represent the fractal nature of racial difference. The imaginary prompted Alexander Weheliye to ask, in *Habeas Viscus*, "why are formations of the oppressed deemed liberatory only if they resist hegemony and/or exhibit the full agency of the oppressed?" (2) What these black scholars all share is an understanding of the multifaceted pains and pleasures of diasporic existence. This ancestral history leaves questions unanswered, and we each find our own way to access the unwritten. I consider my use of "black imaginary" to be another facet of the conversation that already exists where black scholars wrestle to find meaning in violence that feels more personal than historical. The term "black imaginary" prioritizes the shared language and kinship of the diasporic space; I use it to ambiguate scholarly language to match the fluid ambiguity of blackness.

The black imaginary is continued resistance, repeated setbacks, stolen joy, mourning, celebration, justice, freedom. It is the language of negro spirituals sung by

docile slaves supposedly to make the work go faster, while in actuality conveying vital knowledge for a frantic escape. It is the lyrics of "Lift Every Voice and Sing," a Reconstruction-era liberation hymn—colloquially known as The Black National Anthem—used in 2017 to drown out the chants of white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia. More concretely, the black imaginary is a linguistic attempt to cohere a knowledge space that is transatlantic, yet communal: it conveys a liberatory diasporic identity that, though forged by the painful genetic history of the middle passage, is nonetheless collectivized, recognizable, and celebrated. It is black friendship made revolutionary. Many of the ways in which the black imaginary makes meaning are superficially passive, but its survival over the centuries betrays a level of careful intention, of understanding the ancestral sacrifices that continue to inform our future.

In this chapter, I will describe the ways that Wheatley's poetry and letters accessed this imaginary as solace, comfort, and hope. Omise'eke Tinsley has described the "painful fluidities" of black bodies in transit or entombed across the Atlantic—a fluidity visible in the pain of Phillis Wheatley's elegiac poems.[10] As she writes in honor of her dead neighbors, Wheatley also processes the trauma of her middle passage. Similarly, writing to her dear friends allows her to probe the horrors of quotidian enslaved life, as evidenced in her letters to Obour Tanner. In discussing these letters, I highlight how Wheatley engages the black imaginary to maintain an affectionate friendship despite their physical separation by enslavement. Friendship was of particular

[10] "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic."

importance in the eighteenth century, part of the resurgence of interest in classical figures including Aristotle, Cicero, and Pythagoras, all of whom wrote treatises concerning true friendship. Much has been said about the ways that authors of the eighteenth century created a new set of friendship treatises through novels, essays, and letters; because of the transatlantic nature of the black imaginary, I want to build on the discussion of affiliation and unexpected texts between friends. While Wheatley references the neoclassical friendship modes I've described earlier, their influence plays only a minor part in friendship in the black imaginary. Amicitia, described by Schweitzer and Moore and present in Wheatley's "On Friendship," shows Wheatley's belief in the spiritual oneness of true friendship, while her letters engage the futurist yearning of blackness. In these letters to her dearest friend Obour, the potential friendship between Moorhead and Wheatley becomes more legible despite its opacity.

BETWEEN WOMEN

> Let amicitia in her ample reign
> Extend her notes to a Celestial strain
> Benevolent far more divinely Bright
> Amor like me doth triumph at the sight
> When my thoughts in gratitude imploy
> Mental Imaginations give me Joy
> Now let my thoughts in Contemplation steer
> The Footsteps of the Superlative fair.

In this bit of juvenilia, "On Friendship," Wheatley engages neoclassical imagery to describe an ideal companionship exemplifying deeply emotional, non-romantic connections. Though the poem has recognizable couplets of iambic pentameter, it is largely composed of clumsy classical references and loosely connected philosophical musings. Nonetheless, its single stanza makes some recognizable claims about the emotional and creative resonances of strong friendship. Amicitia is personified here as friendship perfected, long-lasting in her "ample reign." That her music "extend[s]…to a Celestial strain" is evidence of Wheatley's conception that true friendship is more than lifelong: it abides even in death, on a heavenly plane typified by light and benevolence. Amor—the personification of love more commonly invoked in romantic treatises—like Wheatley, "triumph[s] at the sight" of this glorious celestial friendship. In this text, such depths of love are integral to any strong relationship. Wheatley then expresses joy at the places her imagination takes her when contemplating friendship; her final couplet, "Now let my thoughts in Contemplation steer / The Footsteps of the Superlative fair," implies the importance of generative imagination to the development of an existential bond of friendship. And indeed, as a black woman writing of deep amicitia between friends while simultaneously being restricted by slavery and its social conscriptions, Wheatley likely spent much energy creating such bonds and imagining ways to sustain them. The breadth and depth of her epistolary writings speaks to this occupation, but her letters to Obour Tanner particularly typify the longevity and importance of Wheatley's friendships. Reading these letters is also integral to my later reading of the friendship between

Wheatley and Scipio Moorhead, as they represent a far more legible relationship between enslaved people while simultaneously "[taking] us out of the confines of the engraved room of the poetry collection's frontispiece into geographies of community, worship, friendship, acquaintance, and eighteenth-century urban living" (Bynum 43). These revealed geographies are imperative to understanding Wheatley's language of friendship, and they emphasize the imaginary aspect of an archive that leaves gaping holes where short visits to each other's homes, small presents, and the kinship of blackness might otherwise live.

Wheatley's seven extant letters to Obour Tanner (spelled in early letters as Arbour) begin in 1772, but Wheatley's regret in her July 19th letter that Tanner "had not rec'd my answer to your first letter" speaks to a much more extensive attempt to exchange letters beyond which those that survive in the Massachusetts Historical Society archives. Nonetheless, the one-sided letters provide valuable insight into the concerns and emotions shared between these two enslaved black women. In the first letter, dated May 19, 1772, Wheatley writes a response to what may have been Tanner's description of her religious conversion. Wheatley writes of her own "great rejoicing" at the "saving change" that Tanner has "emphatically" described. The letter goes on to consider the philosophical exigency of biblical salvation. Wheatley meditates on the example of Christ and his "marvelous displays of Grace and Love" that are an almost inexorable draw to the "endless treasures of his mercy," showing her relationship to the merciful God of the New Testament, rather than the more vengeful God of the Old. Though she thanks the

Lord for "bringing us from a land Semblant of darkness itself," the general tone of the letter reframes this seemingly common epithet against Africa as a more spiritual statement about salvation. Relatedly, Wheatley's letter of Oct. 30, 1773, states, "Dear Obour let us not sell our Birth right for a thousand worlds, which indeed would be as dust upon the Ballance." She calls heaven "our" birthright, putting aside any white claims that cultural knowledge of salvation makes one more deserving of its rewards. At the same time, Wheatley makes a clear statement disregarding any human measure of value, reminding them both that an eternal future must be their only true aspiration. This was not the ignorant and naive acceptance of the so-called benefits of slavery, but rather a way of rethinking the evangelical message to provide uniquely individual solace. Rather than viewing Christianity as the outwardly benevolent dogma of their oppression, these women engaged the black imaginary to create space for their lived experience in the religious imagination, made more possible by the Protestant focus on an unmediated relationship with God. A hallmark of evangelical worship is the shortened distance one must travel to interact with one's savior, the unexpected result being a religion made still more accessible and meaningful to slaves who chose to internalize it as a form of affective kinship.

Her relationship with Tanner was also another avenue to expand the network necessary for the publication of Wheatley's poetry. Though much of *Poems*' success was due to the white acquaintances who inspired many of her poems, Wheatley's letters also point to the ways that her friendship with Tanner and other enslaved and free blacks

allowed for a wider subscription. She writes of this in the October 30th letter, using a more formalized language of friendship to describe her trip to England in search of wider publication networks. Wheatley comments on the restfulness of her trip and speaks of how "The Friends I found there among the Nobility and Gentry, Their Benevolent conduct towards me, the unexpected and unmerited civility and Complaisance with which I was treated by all, fills me with astonishment." Clearly gratified by their kind treatment, she is nonetheless surprised by the experience of kindness from Europeans of diverse social backgrounds. While slavery was still very much in effect in England, manumission and the end of the slave trade had already gained cultural traction—so an intelligent, well-connected enslaved black woman would consequently be less threatening to the status quo. This is evident in the fact that simply traveling to England allowed her to find an audience for her first poetry collection, compared to her later attempt to publish a second collection was unsuccessful due to local American disinterest.[11] Wheatley finally received manumission in late 1773, soon after her return from England and a few months before the death of Susanna Wheatley. After this event, she wrote to Tanner, "imagine the loss of a Parent, Sister or Brother the tenderness of all these were united in her" (March 21, 1774). Then, with the death of John Wheatley in 1778, Phillis' access to white publication networks appeared to dissipate entirely. The ongoing Revolutionary War almost certainly played a part in the difficulties of communication and subscriptions that Wheatley faced during this time.

[11] Joanna Brooks, "Our Phillis, Ourselves"

Regardless, her friendship with Tanner allowed for more lasting, if less productive, avenues for sale. Wheatley ends the October 30, 1773, letter by asking a favor, writing: "I enclose Proposals for my Book, and beg you'd use your interest to get Subscriptions as it is for my Benefit." This request was clearly successful: Wheatley's letter of March 21, 1774, thanks Tanner for her assistance in gaining subscriptions to the book and promises, "I shall send you the 5 books you wrote for, the First convenient opportunity; if you want more, they Shall be ready for you." Wheatley mentions the "money you sent for the 5 books & 2/6 [2 shillings, six pence] more for another, which I now Send & wish safe to hand," as well as the arrival of three hundred editions from England, in her letter on May 6 of the same year, demonstrating her expedient use of mail orders to increase sales. Her letter of thanks written on February 9th of the same year to a Reverend Samuel Hopkins in Newport reinforces her publication networking: she mentions her friend Tanner's role in the successful exchange of money and book copies that took place between them and asks the Reverend's favor in sending her love to Obour. Tanner used her own networks in Newport to disseminate at least six copies of Wheatley's recently published poetry. These networks included not only white members of her community, but also many future founders of the Newport African Union Society, with Obour herself being a founding member of the companion African Benevolent Female Society in 1806. This society was concerned with the good of the black community (particularly for women and children), mutual aid, and self-improvement. Many of its members went on to form the first recognized black churches in town: the

still-functioning United Congregational Church. Although this legacy doesn't directly extend from Wheatley herself, it shows the lasting nature of friendship born of the black imaginary.

After all, Obour Tanner lived until 1835, and she would have held the memory of her dear friend Phillis and the early death faced by Phillis and her family, largely due to the lack of social safety nets available to free blacks. It's likely that every Obour Tanner who lived a long life remembered their own Phillis, and this Obour made it a lifelong effort to support women like her friend. The shortened length of, and widening gap between, their last few letters attests to the lack of recreation time or peace in Wheatley's post-enslaved life. Her letter of May 29, 1778, is three years after the previous one, a delay for which Wheatley profusely apologizes. Her chance to even send the letter occurred only due to an unexpected encounter with Tanner's mistress: Wheatley laments, "I…wish you had timely notice of her departure, so as to have wrote me," and near the end she again references her lack of time, saying, "I have but half an hour's notice; and must apologize for this hasty scrawl." Though this letter is short, it is nonetheless rich with imaginative work, as Wheatley talks of how varied and busy the last three years have been while considering the happiness of an atemporal existence in heaven: "The vast variety of Scenes that have pass'd before us these 3 years past will to a reasonable mind serve to convince us of the uncertain duration of all things Temporal, and the proper result of such a consideration is an ardent desire of, & preparation for, a State and enjoyments which are more Suitable to the immortal mind." One can imagine the

bittersweet emotion of speaking to a dear friend for the first time in years, while knowing that the time will only continue to fly. As women with no time for leisure, the only true respite where they might finally have as much time as they could want to commune is the immortality of salvation. Wheatley clearly understands the diminishing time they have on Earth, imploring Tanner, "You will do me a great favour if you'll write me by every Opp'y [opportunity].—Direct your letters under cover to Mr. John Peters in Queen Street," a location that was and remains part of Boston's Financial District. Whether she was already living with John Peters, her future husband, or simply using his address for more personal correspondence, she clearly trusted him to assist in maintaining her relationship with Tanner.

Though her letters were sparse, Wheatley did not stop writing poetry, despite never being able to garner public interest in a poetry collection again. By May of 1779 Wheatley was newly married, yet also destitute. Her final brief letter to Tanner reads like a hurried note; it is the last known correspondence between the two women. She is clearly aware of a relatively long break in their conversation, writing, "I have not been unmindful of you but a variety of hindrances was the cause of my not writing to you" (May 10, 1779). Yet again it is clear how little free time she had available, only five years after her manumission. Nonetheless, her hope for their sustained friendship continues, as she writes, "I hope our correspondence will revive—and revive in better times—pray write me soon, for I long to hear from you—you may depend on constant replies." The curious gap in their correspondence gives little insight to the last difficult years of

Wheatley's life. This gap does not necessarily mean that those letters never existed—even if they were not penned onto paper, they almost certainly as mental occupations for each woman, as they thought of each other in the stolen moments of their daily lives.

Nowhere is the depth of this friendship more evident than in the benedictions and sign-offs that end Wheatley's letters. From beginning to end, her correspondence was typified by terms of endearment, as she most regularly ends letters referring to herself as Obour's dear friend and affectionate sister. The May 19, 1772, letter ends, "Till we meet in the regions of consummate blessedness, let us endeavor by the assistance of divine grace, to live the life, and we Shall die the death of the Righteous." Likewise, that year's July 19th letter ends with the wish, "when we leave this world may We be his: That this may be our happy case, is the sincere desire Of, your affectionate friend, & humble servant." In both instances, the strongest desire is for togetherness in heaven—a togetherness that would continue for time immemorial despite their lengthy separations on Earth. Though they appear to have never again met before Wheatley's death in 1784, as evidenced by Wheatley's closing language in her last letter to Tanner—"I wish you much happiness and am, Dr. Obour, your friend and sister"—the lack of written evidence is insufficient to quantify the true breadth and depth of their relationship. Wheatley's letters represent a small glimpse at the intensive work of imagining friendship despite the availability of bodily agency, of "[naming] a happiness that she wants to feel on Earth, not just in the afterlife" (Bynum 44). The letters exemplify the specific ways in which black women engaged the black imaginary to invoke diasporic communities. Using this

investigation of Wheatley's imagining of friendship, I next consider her friendship with Scipio Moorhead, which although it has left little trace in the archive, has remained present in the black imaginary due to a poem and a penciled portrait. Reading the enduring amicitia between Tanner and Wheatley brings the potential of this other friendship into a more legible, though no less imagined, existence.

THE POET AND THE PAINTER

There is very little concrete evidence of Scipio Moorhead's existence in the archive, though many have searched.[12] There are records of a young "Scipio Sarahson" being baptized in the care of John and Sarah Moorhead, which shows that he was likely a house slave, but little else is known about Scipio Moorhead's life. The Moorhead and Wheatley families both attended the Old South Meeting House for church, but little is known about contact between the families or among their slaves. It seems plausible that Scipio was an artist of some kind, though much of the evidence for this is in the title of Wheatley's poem, "To SM, a young African Painter, on Seeing his Works," published in her 1773 collection. Because Scipio is so absent from the archive, I want to turn back to the imaginative space of the balcony in the Old South Meeting House that began this chapter. Eric Slauter's reconstruction of Moorhead's history provides strong evidence that he was baptized in the Anglican-affiliated King's Church on 11 June 1760, probably as a small child. Wheatley's forced transport to America in 1761 at the age of seven or

[12] Slauter, "Looking for Scipio Moorhead."

eight means that they were likely close in age. Much as Wheatley was a necessary companion to Susanna, Moorhead appears to fill a similar role in Sarah's life, such that the complicated caste structure of enslavement might relax enough to allow Phillis and Scipio a whispered hello or an exchange of schedules in the balcony before services. Perhaps they both did errands for their slaveholders, running into each other at the book store or milliner's shop and asking each other about their latest creative endeavors. These kinds of encounters might not be visible in the historical record, but these small moments make up the affective imaginary of friendship. Thus, I am less concerned with whether this friendship existed in a more tangible fashion, and I am instead asking what it might mean if such a friendship did occur. This imaginary work grows from the brief lines of poetry (itself a repository of her own black imaginary) that Wheatley herself wrote about an artist named SM. By our assumption of Moorhead's presence in the poem, the poem becomes yet another letter that Wheatley wrote to her friends.

"To SM" is an ekphrastic poem, but alongside this chronicle of her admiration Wheatley simultaneously creates a requiem to the eternal. Because none of SM's work survives today, it is unknown what images inspired Wheatley to write this poem—but the emotional resonance of his work is evident. Beginning by admiring the "lab'ring bosom's deep intent" and the "thought in living characters" that inhabit Moorhead's work, Wheatley expresses her affective response to it as a sudden and heady sensation, writing, "How did these prospects give my soul delight / A new creation rushing on my sight?" Wheatley's artist, a "wond'rous youth," is a creator of worlds in which "Breathing

figures learnt from thee to live." Wheatley next references "the painter's and the poet's fire," which conjures an image of some shared internal flame, sustaining their imaginations and sustained by the affection of their communion. This contemplation of his "noble paths" and "deathless glories" results in a poem both forward-focused and retrospective, verbally manifesting the painting's embodiment of artistic inspiration.

Wheatley then turns the eye of the reader toward more eternal pursuits, offering a blessing for SM: "May the charms of each seraphic theme / Conduct thy footsteps to immortal fame!" While the artist's immortality through production is a consistent theme within neoclassical poetry, Wheatley's use of it to describe herself and a fellow enslaved artist is itself a radical act of imagination. Regardless of the worth that her white acquaintances placed on her genius, the legalized inhumanity of slavery viewed black bodies merely as sites of profit. That Wheatley could still imagine a future of freedom evidences the historicity of the black imaginary, alive before it was described and integral to the survival of black bodies in a world utterly devoted to their disposability. The stanza continues with a catalogue of the many pleasures that await in heaven, as Wheatley entreats SM and the reader to raise their imaginative sights "High to the blissful wonders of the skies / Elate thy soul, and raise thy wishful eye." Despite the longing displayed in her use of "wistful" in the preceding line, Wheatley is now "Thrice happy, when exalted to survey / That splendid city, crown'd with endless day." The new Jerusalem "blooms in endless spring," and the anaphoric use of "endless day…endless spring" as alternating

end rhymes in the second stanza's final quartet shows us Wheatley's idea of heavenly perfection: an eternal Spring day that brings new inspiration at every moment.

Life is easy in this eternal landscape, as "calm and serene thy moments glide along," but this serenity does not quench their artistic fire; rather, Wheatley envisions "the muse inspir[ing] each future song" as their newfound freedom opens to greater pleasure that they can't help but immortalize in their chosen media. Like her benedictions to Obour Tanner, the poem's next lines offer hope for SM's heavenly future: "With the sweets of contemplation bless'd, / May peace with balmy wings your soul invest!" These lines open up space for Wheatley to imagine what sweets heaven will provide for them both:

> But when these shades of time are chas'd away,
> And darkness ends in everlasting day,
> On What seraphic pinions shall we move,
> And view the landscapes in the realms above? (23-26)

This image of the two artists, flying on wings of heaven to explore newly opened landscapes, reminds the reader of the bodily circumscription that both experienced in earthly life. Wheatley's desire for an "everlasting day" of freedom is all the more bittersweet, as her life was comprised of many difficult and long days tempered by stolen moments when her mind could at last turn to poetic concerns. Rather than a series of endless days—something she likely had a lifetime's experience with—Wheatley's idea of heaven is one enduring and perfect day. One day in which time has little meaning, but

ever more avenues for enjoyment. On this perfect day, she writes, “There shall thy tongue in heav’nly murmurs flow, / And there my muse with heav’nly transport glow.” This new freedom will enrich their artistic pursuits with the concerns of heaven, so that even the muse of her poetry will experience an awakening transformation. In heaven she can at last leave behind the neoclassical imagery of earthly life:

> No more to tell of Damon’s tender sighs,
> Or rising radiance of Aurora’s eyes
> For nobler themes demand a nobler strain,
> And purer language on th’ ethereal plain. (29-32)

This is likely a reference to some of Moorhead’s paintings; she clearly views heavenly pursuits to be of far grander import than those of neoclassical figures. These more noble themes remain unknown, but the mere hope of their influence in the celestial sphere animates this imaginary, much like the imaginary of constant companionship that Wheatley shared with Tanner. Through these letters and poems, Wheatley creates a shared network of black futurity, of an imaginary extending beyond the earthly plane that both Obour Tanner and SM may access in times of little hope. This poetic treatise to black futurity closes with another call to the gentle muse, this time to “Cease…the solemn gloom of night / Now seals the fair creation from my sight.” Perhaps this “solemn gloom” returning is the realization that for now, earthly human existence is her lot. Nonetheless, that she invokes the muse shows an awareness that maintaining a single-

minded hope for the future is to waste time here on earth. The black imaginary is a space of solace and hope, not ignorance.

As Wheatley provided in verse and prose her vision of black kinship, how might SM have evoked a similar connection in drawing her portrait? This question is difficult to answer based on the archive, but the depth of friendship Wheatley expressed to SM in this poem has continued to excite those who work to discover the provenance of her only known image. Wheatley's poetry collection was originally published with this portrait as its frontispiece. It is still reproduced in the front matter of many recent editions, and among the images in scholarly readings, of her work. Commissioned in 1773 by the Duchess of Huntingdon, a personal friend of Wheatley's, the portrait served to identify her to the British public (her first audience) while simultaneously proving that *Poems* was truly the work of a black woman. Though converted to a wood engraving for publication purposes, the idea that it began as a pencil-drawn portrait done by Scipio Moorhead continues to circulate within academic writing despite no clear origination point. I too am taken with the idea of a fellow black artist creating a visual representation of Wheatley that continues to provide access to the black imaginary of her poetry.

Portrait of Phillis Wheatley (Scipio Moorhead, 1773)

Though the impulse to credit Moorhead remains present, scholars have often failed to notice or credit the imaginative implications contained in the portrait. Vincent Carretta's 2011 work, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage*, is considered the most rigorous academic biography of Phillis Wheatley. In it he retells the contours of Wheatley's short life through archival sleuthing, and also nods to Moorhead as the possible original artist of Wheatley's portrait: "Wheatley's frontispiece may have been designed in Boston, perhaps by Scipio Moorhead, a black artist to whom Wheatley apparently addressed one of the poems in her book" (100). At the same time that he recognizes this apocryphal connection, Carretta goes on to close read the portrait's more obvious visual signifiers of subjection. In a footnote to the chapter, Carretta briefly nods to other, more positive readings of the portrait, but his main reading of the portrait spends far less time on these "revolutionary implications" and focuses instead on "elements in the frontispiece…designed to limit those implications":

> The frontispiece emphasizes Wheatley's African heritage and her inferior social status by containing her likeness within an oval whose framing words appear to restrict the extent of her gaze. The Countess of Huntingdon obviously had no objection to Susanna Wheatley's request that Phillis "should be dress'd plain," as befit her condition. The dark string around Wheatley's neck subtly reminded viewers of her enslaved colonial status. Slaves in earlier paintings were conventionally depicted wearing collars "to signifie whose Servant" they were.

> The string also recalls the common association during the period of favored slaves and collared pets. (101)

Carretta moves on, leaving the reader to consider this comparison between a "Genius in Bondage" and a cosseted, comfortable pet; it is a disturbing acquiescence to the narrative of benevolent slave-ownership. His reading is correct in many ways, from the symbols of favored slaves insisted upon by Susanna Wheatley, to the restricting quality of the portrait's frame, which identifies her as "Phillis Wheatley, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley of Boston." Nonetheless, in allowing Wheatley's masters to define his reading of her image, Carretta misses an opportunity to repair centuries of misreading. The symbols required by those who subjected Wheatley and Moorhead do not preclude the emotional resonance of the other signifiers in the image. It is difficult to reparatively read the lives of the enslaved without understanding the sustenance provided by the black imaginary, for white bodies are disposed to read black bodies as always-already suffering. But imagining Wheatley circumscribed is to—once again—reinscribe the hegemony of white subjectivity.

With the friendship of Phillis Wheatley and Scipio Moorhead, and his original drawing of this portrait, at the forefront of my reading, the image provides insight into Wheatley's affective creative spirit. In the image, she is shown seated at a small oval table. One hand is poised over quill, ink, and paper, while the other props up her chin, with pointer finger extended to her cheek. It is a recognizable thinker's pose, and her prolific writing is evidence of her rigorous approach to imaginative work. Her pose is

active, giving the impression that she has only momentarily looked up from composing to reconsider a line or turn of phrase. Beside her paper is an unidentified octavo, perhaps a collection of classical short stories or poetry, close at hand for reference or renewed inspiration. Though "dress'd plain," which it seems Susanna Wheatley specifically requested, Wheatley clearly took pride in a neat appearance.

Phillis Wheatley's portrait, then, is rendered through the eyes of two friends with vastly different perspectives. In Susanna Wheatley's eyes she is a favored slave who is allowed an extensive education, creative license, and the tenuous claim of friendship, but always within expected norms of black subjection. To Scipio Moorhead she is a friend of the heart, and with him she would gladly spend eternity creating art and exploring the universe. Despite the words establishing ownership and that "restrict the extent of her gaze," the portrait subject's gaze feels unconfined and introspective; she is immersed in the heady space of creative imagination. Perhaps SM drew this portrait while she wrote her own everlasting textual portrait of their friendship, and in this moment when she looked up and inward for inspiration, he immortalized the black friendship that was visible to those with eyes to see. The epigenetic understanding of this quiet network, forged by displacement and suffering, can be traced through time and across oceans. To be black in the diaspora is to imagine a life and history for our ancestors, whose thoughts we can only empathize with. Consequently, I want to turn in this next section to an analysis of black imaginary networks made possible by the published work of Phillis Wheatley.

On Imagining Friendship

The black imaginary network around Phillis Wheatley extended beyond her large circle of acquaintances, as her life and work inspired the writing of further letters and poems both in her lifetime and after. Contemporaries Ignatius Sancho and Jupiter Hammon, both of whom wrote about her works in 1778—January and August, respectively—illuminate a transatlantic network of dissemination and engagement in which enslaved and free blacks might come to know and address each other through their creative output. Ignatius Sancho does not appear to have ever met or corresponded with Wheatley. Born on a slave ship and orphaned at a young age, Sancho moved to England and was manumitted shortly after. Due to his influential social circle and status as a well-known London-based actor and writer, his opinions and position on world issues were often solicited, leading to a significant archive of his transatlantic correspondence, through which he learned of Wheatley's work and life. In his January 27, 1778 letter to Jabez Fisher, an American Quaker and travel writer based in Philadelphia, Sancho lays out his readerly response to the two books that Fisher has sent him—one of which was Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. He begins his review with the unnamed second book, then speaks "with gratitude" of the "Christian…learned Author of that most valuable book," and discusses their impact on him in emotionally resonant language. He describes his bittersweet response to the book as physical "double or mixt" sensations, brought on by the descriptions of the "unchristian and diabolical usage of my brother Negroes" that he read in the unnamed tome.

Sancho spends considerable time here considering the wide-reaching effects of the diaspora, particularly the way that it drew every dark person into a family because slavery purposely destroyed black family structures. He writes, "my heart was torn for the sufferings—which, for aught I know—some of my nearest kin might have undergone." His realization showcases the diasporic understanding of how the forced creation of fluid bodies erased many previous bonds of kinship, and the loss of this genealogy in turn forced fluid interpretations of kinship, so that a shared history of erasure becomes the foundation for newly-imagined bonds. These bonds, forged in the holds of slave ships and nurtured by generations of oral history, expanded to encompass the black bodies at the furthest reaches of the transatlantic diaspora. Much like unacquainted black men passing each other on the street in the twenty-first century exchange a knowing nod, the nod that Sancho gives to Wheatley in this letter is one of knowing, of history, of recognition that their eighteenth-century existence was publicly inflected and circumscribed by the institutions of whiteness. But this nod also says yes, we both get it, we're both aware of what's happening here. Though Sancho and Wheatley never contacted or otherwise interacted with each other, the affective depth of the black imaginary experience created shadow-bonds of kinship between them that were evinced when he read her poetry. His review of this unnamed text, which chronicles the horrors of slavery, serves as a segue into his emotional discussion of Wheatley's life and

Sancho briefly wonders at the ability of his fellow Englishmen to ignore the horrors of slavery before turning to a description of his affective reaction to Wheatley's

art. He vehemently castigates Wheatley's owners and all those who praised her creativity while maintaining her captivity, writing: "it reflects nothing either to the glory or generosity of her master—if she is still his slave."[13] He accuses John Wheatley of glorying "in the low vanity of having in his wanton power a mind animated by Heaven," and indeed, what glory could come from owning an inspired genius, let alone any human being? Helena Woodard noted the "contradictions between Sancho's acknowledgement of both the critical need for white patronage and frustration from blacks having to utilize such patronage;" this frustration is another inherent facet of the diasporic black experience (86). Of Wheatley's book he writes, "Phyllis's [sic] poems do credit to nature—and put art—merely as art—to the blush." Not only is her work art, but it is art that does more than merely ornament. This is no occasional poetry; in Sancho's mind her work is so transcendent that it tarnishes her owners as they continue viewing her as a financial investment rather than a human. In claiming that she is "animated by Heaven," Sancho rewrites Wheatley's slavery as a sin against God, more so than against man. In so doing, he is able to couch his critique of "the list of splendid—titled—learned names" who signed her attestation as a moral judgment, a disbelief that whiteness could take them so far as to recognize her genius while reifying her slavery. This, he writes, is a clear example of "how very poor the acquisition of wealth and knowledge are—without generosity—feeling—and humanity." To further support this critique, he turns to the

[13] Sancho is apparently unaware that Wheatley was freed in 1773. She notes in a letter to Colonel David Worcester in October of that year, "Since my return to America my Master, has at the desire of my friends in England given me my freedom."

biblical story of the Good Samaritan and compares these "good great folks" to the "Priests and the Levites in sacred writ" who "passed by—not one good Samaritan amongst them," a comparison that evokes images of those callously self-absorbed people who ignore seemingly insignificant expressions of suffering enacted by bodies outside of their sphere of interest.

Biblically, the Samaritans are a neighboring ethnic group represented as unpopular outsiders to the Jewish faith and birthright. However, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, a traveling Hebrew man is set upon by robbers and left for dead. It is neither the pious nor the priests of his own religion who stop to help him, but rather a Samaritan who takes care of him until he is healed (Luke 10:30-37). The comparison here is clear: whiteness and Christianity may seem sufficient for some, but it is the lasting and unconditional friendship of black people that truly embodies the empathy which connects humanity. Sancho seems aware that Susanna and Phillis Wheatley spoke of each other as close friends, but he also quite directly implies that without freedom and equality, true friendship cannot exist. Though he was free for most of his life, he understands that slavery's trauma for Wheatley (particularly as a close companion to her owner) could never be mitigated by the small freedoms that their friendship provided her.

This thematic concern with the trauma of slavery continues in Jupiter Hammon's poem "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley," in which Hammon critiques Wheatley's work while offering her the space to expand her affective community. Unlike Wheatley, Hammon was born into and died in slavery, but his relationship to the family that owned

him was ostensibly a close one. Owned by Henry Lloyd of New York and educated with Lloyd's children in order to later perform trade negotiations for Henry in adulthood, Hammon's experience as the extended "family" of his owners appears to have been similar to Wheatley's position. Hammon is credited as the first black person to achieve publication in the early American republic. In his poem addressed to Wheatley, he emphasizes the need for an active imaginary of spiritual freedom inflected by Christian faith. The poem consists of twenty-one stanzas that consider Wheatley's relationship to God, from her first introduction to Christianity through death and afterlife. Most tellingly, "death" occurs in the fifth stanza, leaving the vast majority of the stanzas to consider the uncertainties of the eternal. In focusing primarily on life after death, Hammon enacts the black imaginary in the margins of and through the text of their Christian oppressors. He claims that this imaginary transcends the constraints of embodied existence, particularly by allowing black bodies to experience the transports of heaven as affective sustenance. Each verse is accompanied by a biblical reference that enhances or amplifies his message to Wheatley. The first stanza commands the reader to "adore / The wisdom of thy God" in having been brought to America. While this sounds like the mentality of abjection that some scholars have criticized in Wheatley's "On Being Brought from Africa to America," Hammon includes verses from Ecclesiastes also exhort, "when they shall be afraid of that which is high....Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was....Vanity of Vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity" (12:5-8). This valediction, signaling Hammon's concern with the eternal rather than ephemeral, transforms the stanza from the slightly

sycophantic musings of a Christian slave to a meditation on the relative insignificance of life when balanced against eternity.

The second stanza emphasizes this message, claiming that "God's tender mercy" is truly to thank that Wheatley has not "been left behind / Amidst a dark abode." While this dark abode seems to refer to Africa and the narrative of benevolent slavery would cast it as such, the language of Psalm 125 decenters the role of slaveholders and traders in the spiritual relationship between God and enslaved: "for the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity" (3). While the earthly rod of slavery and displacement may fall upon black slaves now, their eternal happiness and exit from this dark abode is assured, so long as they remain on the path of righteousness. Hammon clearly considers Wheatley among the righteous, and even characterizes her as "a pattern… / To youth of Boston town." On three separate occasions after mentioning death in the fifth stanza, Hammon directly addresses Wheatley by name and implores her to remain close to the God that inspires her heavenly writing. He commands,

> Come you, Phillis, now aspire,
> And seek the living God,
> So step by step thou mayst go higher,
> Till perfect in the word. (33-36)

He riffs off the Bible passage "seek, and ye shall find," offering the hope that Wheatley would reach ever higher heights of inspiration if she should rely on and actively seek the

Lord (Matt. 7:7-8). Even if she were to at some point feel forgotten by God, Hammon advises, "Jesus Christ is thy relief, / Thou hast the holy word," reminding her of the special solace that many diasporic blacks found in the arms of the Christian god. This is a god without the preference for one ethnicity that was ascribed to him by ancient Hebrews, and without the benevolent imperialism of the eighteenth century. Hammon makes this clear by saying, "dear Phillis, be advised, / To drink Samaria's flood," a reference to the Samaritan woman who asked Jesus if she too could be saved. Jesus' answer, that "whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst," would be of great comfort to Hammon or Wheatley, or any other person living in the margins and uncertain of their access to the eternal (John 4:14). At every turn through this poem, Hammon uses the Bible that they both love to remind Wheatley, the friend he never met, of their enduring future despite their short and difficult lives on Earth.

As evidenced by the writings of both Sancho and Hammon, imagining friendship in freedom was and is an important aspect of black diasporic identity. Indeed, this work of imagining Wheatley free has continued to inspire black artists and critics. Tara Bynum, writing of the difficulties Wheatley and Tanner faced in maintaining their friendship, says "whenever I think about Wheatley brushing her teeth or walking down the street or writing letters, I can't help wondering if she thought about her racial position or her enslavement all the time (e.g., 'Dag, I'm still a slave')" (42). This mental image immediately centers the quotidian in Wheatley's life, as well as the bonds of friendship that provided her with lifelong sustenance. It asks the reader to consider an experience of

embodiment that understands, but is not fully beholden to, the language of subjection and agency. It also re-centers Wheatley as a body with agency, though one who is limited by circumstances and the memory of violence. It indicates the emotional bonds that black women create together across time.

Traditional modes of writing and art are not the only ways the black imaginary is engaged through Wheatley's daily experiences. Bynum, along with Alexis Pauline Gumbs, created on the blogging site Tumblr "a collaborative meditation on affection, belonging, longing, ownership and other ships…inspired by their antecedents." These letters, written intermittently across the period from 2011 to 2015, represent an archive of feelings loosely organized around the words and thoughts of the black women who came before. I call these Tumblr posts letters because they are expressly meant as messages exchanged between people, but their content is more imaginative than epistolary. The exchanges include snippets from published and unpublished texts, collages, and ruminations on the work of other black women scholars, as well as relevant snippets like the merchant Timothy Finch's note to the ship *Phillis'* captain, Peter Quinn, requesting that he "be sure to bring as Few Women & Girls as possibl" (Bynum and Gumbs). What, I think, would her life have been if there had been no women and girls on the ship at all? Or I imagine what if she had been allowed the chance to become the genius she always was with her family, language, and culture surrounding and guiding her growth. These textual snapshots purposely leave room for the imagination to see the pains and pleasures of blackness, sometimes through Phillis Wheatley's eyes. She embodies the black genius

forcibly uprooted and forced to accept the value judgments of those without, but also the forgotten black genius unfulfilled and long embraced by the ocean's life cycles. The girl who emerged from that transatlantic voyage with a new unfamiliar name would have known intimately that her new home had no consideration for black life they could not capitalize on. In truth, her genius was more than any slave owner could attest to, because they could not imagine such a circumstance.

Understanding the true layers of her success requires recognition of the knowledge that keeps black bodies safe when death is always at hand. This recognition is evident in *dear girl*, a 2015 chapbook by drea brown that imagines the girl before Phillis Wheatley was given that name. Thinking back on the wisdom imparted by her mother, and ruminated on constantly in her oceanic crossing, this girl of unknown name says:

> now I search out blues so I will not forget:
> robin egg ribbon juniper berry
> roll my tongue against the back of my teeth
> I spit
> and write
> jesus saves (42)

Holding her tongue and imbibing Christianity is the survival tactic that ancestral wisdom has taught her. This girl, and others like her, are not unwitting and undifferentiated bodies traversing the Atlantic; in these poems they are imaginative and self-determining figures who take care of domestic responsibilities with the appearance of docility that hides their

intelligently calculating awareness of the power structures surrounding them. Wheatley's success as a published author and the archival evidence of her many-pronged sales approaches show a woman with forethought and self-awareness. To credit the recognition of her white friends as the backbone of her success is to ignore the work Wheatley put in to be noticed at all. It would soon be the national law that enslaved blacks were not truly people; why then should the kindest slaveholder, which is the purest oxymoron, feel differently? No part of slavery is benevolent, and Wheatley's access to publication should not be read as such. Rather, the personal and transatlantic relationships she formed were her way of capitalizing on the system that sought to commodify her. In many of her friendships affection was subordinate to survival, but the record of her black friendships illustrates the underlying kinship created by enslavement. Black friendship is indistinct from black kinship: I am your friend because you are kin, and our friendship relies on the emotional depths of this kinship. It is kinship of body, not country. Other than a shared experience of blackness, nothing else is needed to solidify this relationship. With this relationship the devaluation of our bodies becomes a footnote to the greater story of black resilience through the fires of white supremacy and rage.

Coda

Mundane Vulnerability: Finding Community with the Earth

My dissertation has examined how western norms of kinship and solidarity consolidate around capitalism in the eighteenth century, and how friendship in name can masquerade as all manner of evils. The first two chapters chronicle what I learned about white people and the politics of affiliation; the final chapter showed how Phillis Wheatley's poems offer a blueprint for black futurity despite the historical Western framework. Reading her work showed me how deeply black femme poetics can convert thought-potential into kinetic energy through the formation of communities that disrupt the overbearing weight of captivity. I had to develop that energy and community just to exist while black in the heady liberal space of Austin, Texas.

In 2013, I moved to Austin from rural Pennsylvania, yet I had never felt like an outlier until the first time I stepped onto the University of Texas' campus for orientation. I'd been told that Austin was a progressive paradise, but when I finally settled in and looked around, I was bewildered to somehow be in the whitest town I'd ever seen in my life. I was dismayed by the unending sea of liberal white people who all seemed to think that "keeping it weird" meant having identical beards. After my years living in layered rural societies—diverse Adventist hubs nestled in small white towns, inside of two political swing states—I strained to see the appeal of living in a space where community was determined by comfortable homogeneity. The few black friends I could find all

shared my sense of frustration and bewilderment. I began to resent this town and its self-congratulatory white people; this settled into a simmering rage by the autumn of 2016.

The months leading up to the presidential election were filled with lukewarm endorsements for Hillary from "cool" people and from media profiles about how much she deserved to win. By election night their excitement felt more like desperation, and I knew they couldn't quite see that a white woman who believes she deserves power could save only the neoliberals among us. I went to a friend's party that night against my better judgment, with a knot in my stomach. Earlier I'd seen images of white women who'd flocked to Rochester, NY to leave "I voted" stickers on Susan B. Anthony's grave, a woman who didn't give a fuck about black women, and I knew: that trash can of a man was going to be president. We knew. Black people knew even as our friends purchased champagne to celebrate the first female president, a dissonance perfectly represented by Chris Rock in a post-election Saturday Night Live skit.

Liberal white America had no idea what was happening around them because they had cut off their racist uncles and grandparents back home in their small towns. They had surrounded themselves with friends who believed what they did; who took gentrification as a sign that more whites were learning to run to the city for true knowledge. This city, this Austin, is a fever dream of white liberality, a place where leftists can relax knowing that they are safe from association with their family's racism. Austin insulates and celebrates this freedom from white guilt, proudly crowing that here you are free to be "weird." Meanwhile, I was drowning slowly in quicksand, captive to a dissertation that I

didn't want to write—except that I couldn't give it up without understanding the imaginative space that gave Phillis Wheatley the strength to write her own eternity.

Without Phillis Wheatley, I could never have survived Austin. Phillis was an eighteenth-century poet in Boston; she lived as a slave; she died alone. She wrote poetry of loss and grief, of imagination and historicity. Phillis is the reason I stayed as the creeping years unfolded. I knew I was in the best possible place to get to know her better, and I craved that in a way I'd never before encountered with poetry. When I first read the poem I write most about, "To SM, a young African Painter, on Seeing his Works," I knew immediately that I was witnessing something *necessary*. I was seeing a black woman in the most abject circumstances lay claim to happiness in a way that sprang eternal, that kept her creative and open to the muse throughout her all-too-brief life. In Wheatley I saw something that my soul needed, but that (I thought at first) no one else could visualize. It wasn't hard to get this impression. Early criticism of Wheatley's work focuses chiefly on the veracity of her claim to it, considering her status as a slave. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. was the first to point out the published attestation of Wheatley's creativity and intelligence, signed by important men in Boston, as proof that she must indeed have been impressive to get their attention. White women have written important work about her ability to harness the emotions of her neighborhood to sell books, returning parts of her agency that the archive stole. Black femmes, though—they understood Wheatley as I saw her. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Tara Bynum, drea brown—all are women who recognize that Phillis never had the luxury of forgetting her pain. At the

intersection of black, queer, and femme poetics is a deep recognition that our existence is inherently radical, our words filled with truths that you can ignore but never refute.

This self-knowledge is unavailable to those who cannot see their subservience to white supremacy and we black femmes, left to absorb it, become adept at assessing your damage without your permission. Although we were separated by centuries, I felt Phillis' unspoken pain toward her owner and friend Susanna Wheatley. It was a complicated relationship that lasted until Susanna's death, and is usually seen as evidence of Phillis' thorough acculturation to and appreciation for the love and education the Wheatleys invested in her. But I knew that interpretation was wrong because I've been friends with white women. I'd seen how, when white people gain the friendship of black people, they begin to think the rules no longer apply to them; that their constant microaggressions will be forgiven because they can claim the word *friend*, not knowing that earning friendship only made their white behavior less tolerable; that their failures were more painful because the struggle for trust had left behind its own scar tissue that was now sliced open and unlikely to heal.

Austin has taught me a lot of things: That white people will lie to themselves if it means. That many progressive whites who ostensibly care for black lives lack the capacity to sustain friendships with black people. That the louder and more publicly a white person proclaims their dedication to black lives, the more likely they are to be in denial of their internalized anti-blackness. That my gut, the thing that supposedly went against objective reason, knew these truths long before my brain could accept them. That

gentrified spaces contained many ghosts. How else could so many white people who love black people have such happy lives in Austin, where the black population shrinks every year? Where the once-segregated East Side of Interstate 35 became the hot spot for whites who prefer stimulating conversation of an evening, rather than the boisterous drunkenness of West 6th Street? For white liberals, Austin is safety; for me, it is political prison.

Like many of white liberalism's founding myths, the modern conviction that rural communities are uniformly white and racist is a self-assurance that their metropolitan colonies are a necessary fortress. Because white liberals talk of black lives and sustainable living, they believe they have transcended their simpler counterparts, have actively begun the transformation that will supposedly kill off the racists if we only wait long enough. It is the exact image of Raymond Williams' capitalist city, created by people who have read Williams without seeing themselves in his words. America's countryside is still simple, but in late capitalism it is far from bucolic. As the population moves back toward the gentrified city, America's rural areas have been left to fend for themselves—they have become food deserts with underfunded schools and social programs. Rural life means so many different things across the country, but white liberalism flattens that complexity into one easily disregarded experience. Their disregard also glosses over the black people who have survived and sustained themselves on the land that we had once been forced to work. This moment of rural grassroots revival and survival is one that I feel compelled to engage with, to once again feel tethered to

community as a site for transformative mundanity, where the promise of security is impossible and thus abandoned.

The craving for safety is the backbone of the American dream. Homo sapiens developed a heightened anxiety to keep itself alive; this anxiety should alert us to the persistent threat of white supremacy. But white supremacy is a cancerous mutation that the body perversely refuses to confront. Phillis Wheatley, genius though she was, could not physically escape this system that needs and despises us, that uses our bodies for profit or propaganda to assuage its own fear of the dark. Right now, there are necessary conversations happening around America's dedication to surveillance and enclosure, police and military power, and dark web white supremacy. These conversations destroy us slowly and they will never cease. Phillis Wheatley, in writing about a singular moment of black friendship, made an average day into a celestial escape; the quotidian into a meditation. She drew an image for readers to submerge themselves in the healing waters that SM inspired. I similarly hope to treat the overwhelming political tensions we face as a preexisting condition of being, a state of constant bodily horror that becomes the backdrop to a life well-lived.

Like Phillis Wheatley's ability to bring forth black friendship through abject circumstances, I have learned to focus on the community, on cherishing the mundane—those moments that may not merit the archive because there is no audience for black mundanity. What we do when we don't serve white supremacy means little to the canon, but so much for our survival. Cookouts, group messages, talking shit on the front porch—

the mundane is not of heaven, but of this earth; of this soil; of life's persistence; of the ancestors who taught us to survive so that we all may thrive.

To find beauty in the mundane, I will return to the land and the people who live alongside it. In my next life as an oral historian of futurity and friendship, I want to explore the land that this settler nation resides on. I will engage with people whose imagined communities are smaller and more meaningful than the nation, because their identities are not subsumed but accommodated in its formation. I plan to focus most on people who are, like myself, in some way considered single or alone, to learn how they have formed their own meaningful communities with the living creatures around them in ways that highlight the diverse knowledge and experience that comes from mundanity lived intentionally. I am open to all definitions of this diversity—species, age, sexuality, location, health—but my belief is that we are most human when we can locate ourselves as parts of a planet-sized living organism. When we sustain the Earth, we sustain our ancestral need for belonging and, I believe, find the security that we so desperately crave.

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